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SERMONS

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

CONTAINING,

I. Of Self-Denial.
II. The Gospel a Law of Liberty.
III. Of Repentance.
IV. Of Repentance.
V. *Peter*'s Denial of his Master, practically improved.
VI. Of Justification by Faith.
VII. Of a Conscience void of Offence.
VIII. Perfect Love gives Boldness in the Day of Judgment.
IX. Loving Christ above all, the Character of his true Disciples.
X. Of the proper Improvement of Occasions of Sorrow.
XI. The Happiness of the Righteous in all Circumstances illustrated.
XII. The Path of the Just, like the shining Light.

By *JOHN ABERNETHY*, M. A.

With a PREFACE,

Containing the

LIFE of the AUTHOR.

The THIRD EDITION.

In FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

Printed for D. BROWNE, without *Temple-Bar*; T. OSBORNE, in *Grays-Inn*; and A. MILLAR, in the *Strand*.

M.DCC.LXII.

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PREFACE.

IF *publiſhing the following memoirs ſhould appear to need any apology, no apology could be ſufficient: But it is hoped, that upon a peruſal of them, they will be found not unacceptable. Indeed life, in ſuch a ſtation as that in which Mr.* Abernethy *was placed, cannot furniſh thoſe incidents which are moſt amuſing to the imagination, or which have great influence upon the ſtate of mankind and public affairs: It is the hiſtory of a few only, the great and powerful, that gives entertainment of this kind; but the ingenuous and thinking muſt be ſenſible, that in other ſtations the moſt illuſtrious patterns of virtue are often found; and the man who wants to make his heart better, by ſurveying human nature in all the finiſhings of virtuous improvement, and the various methods of diſcipline, by which the perfection of it is to*

be attained, will find his account happily in such lives as that of Mr. Abernethy: *It may be very serviceable to all who attentively peruse it, particularly to those, who have chosen the holy ministry for the business of their lives: They will see this station adorned with every thing necessary to render it reputable and useful; one of the soundest minds joined with one of the best of hearts; and a life under the power of the worthiest principles.*

HE was the son of Mr. *John Abernethy*, dissenting minister in *Colraine*. His mother was a daughter of *Walkingshaw* of *Walkingshaw*, in *Renfrewshire* in *Scotland*. He was born *October* 19, 1680, and continued nine years under the care of his parents. In 1689, he was separated from them, his father being sent by the dissenting ministers to *London*, to sollicit some public affairs; his mother, in the tumult occasioned by the insurrection of the *Irish*, withdrew from her own dwelling to *Derry*. He at this time was with a relation in *Ballymenagh*, who, in that general confusion, determined to remove to *Scotland*; and, having no opportunity of conveying this child to his mother,

mother, carried him along with him. This was the means of his eſcaping the hardſhips of the ſiege of *Derry*, in which Mrs. *Abernethy* loſt all her other children. When he had been three years in *Scotland*, which he ſpent at the grammar-ſchool, he returned to his father's family, then fixed in *Colraine*. Here he continued at ſchool, till he was thirteen, and then was ſent to *Glaſgow*-college: This he often regretted as an error in the management of his education; ſeeing however parents might flatter the genius of a child in their own imaginations, it could not be reaſonably thought, that he had ſufficient knowledge of claſſical authors, to fit him for academical ſtudies, or that his mind was enough ripened for that reflection, which is neceſſary to make them ſucceſsful.

It may not perhaps be diſagreeable to the reader, to mention a very remarkable interpoſition of providence in preſerving his life, when on his way to *Scotland*. At *Belfaſt*, he was diverting himſelf with a ſervant who attended him, upon the great bridge, by which that town is joined to the county of *Down*; they ſtood upon the bridge

a conſiderable time; but Mr. *Abernethy* hapening to caſt his eye upon ſomething at a diſtance which catched his fancy, they ran off on a ſudden; and, the moment they removed, the arch, upon which they had been ſtanding, fell down; ſo they very narrowly eſcaped being cruſhed to pieces.

He continued at college, till he took the degree of *Maſter of Arts:* Then his own inclination led him to the ſtudy of phyſic; but he was diverted from this by the advice of his friends, and applied himſelf to that of divinity; in purſuance of which he went to *Edinburgh*, and was ſome time under the care of the celebrated profeſſor *Campbel.* Upon his return home, he proceeded in his ſtudies with great ſucceſs, and was ſoon taken notice of by the preſbytery of *Route*, (of which his father was a member) and, under their direction, went through the uſual trials, as a candidate for the miniſtry. He was licenſed to preach, before he was one and twenty. In *June* 1701, he had an invitation to preach in the diſſenting congregation at *Antrim*, which was then vacant; and the people, upon hearing him, expreſſed an inclination to call him to

to the paſtoral charge; but he reſolved, before he ſettled any where, to ſpend ſome time in *Dublin*. He preached in ſeveral congregations in the city, particularly that of *Woodſtreet*, from which he received an invitation to ſtay with them ſome time: This they deſired, with an intention of chooſing him to the paſtoral office, in conjunction with the late Reverend Mr. *Boyſe*; but his father's advice, not diſagreeable to his own inclinations, determined him to return to the north. he quickly received an unanimous call from the congregation of *Antrim*; but before he was ordained there, his father died; of whom all who knew him, had an high eſteem: And a judicious friend, who was intimately acquainted with him writes thus concerning him: "He "was an eminent chriſtian, a learned di- "vine, a vigilant, laborious paſtor, a man "of deep penetration, and ſolidity of judg- "ment, of a ſtrength of memory almoſt "unparalled, of an extenſive public ſpirit, "a delicate taſte for correct ſpeaking and "writing, and a man of polite behaviour "an addreſs."

COLRAINE being vacant by the death of the father, presented a call to the son; so there being a competition between that congregation and *Antrim*, the matter was referred to the general * synod, who gave their decision in favour of *Antrim*, where Mr. *Abernethy* was ordained, *August* 8, 1703. A little after this he married Mrs. *Susannah Jordan*, whose father was dead, and her mother married to *Dominic Heyland*, Esq; of *Castleroe*. Mrs. *Heyland* was a woman of a very uncommon character, much admired, especially for the generosity of her spirit and tender affections, and for most exemplary piety. Her daughter *Abernethy* had, with great success, imitated the fair pattern she had every day before her; and Mr. *Abernethy* found himself every way happy in the conjugal relation.

His congregation at *Antrim* was a large one, and he applied himself to the pastoral

* That is, the yearly meeting of the whole dissenting ministers associated in the North, with a ruling elder for each minister. This, according to their constitution, is the highest church judicatory, to which appeals lie from lesser associations, usually called *Sub-synods:* As to these last, appeals lie from the several *Presbytries* within their bounds.

work

work with great diligence. He became much admired for his public performances; and, as his heart was much ſet upon the acquiſition of knowledge, he was very induſtrious in reading. Hs was, indeed, the principal life of a ſociety of miniſters and candidates in thoſe parts, who, from time to time met, to ſpend a day in uſeful converſation, and in communicating their ſtudies; an excellent deſign, and which was carried on for ſeveral years, not without conſiderable ſucceſs.

He was in great eſteem with the gentlemen of the firſt rank in the neighbourhood. The vivacity of his ſpirit, true wit, ſo corrected, as to be perfectly conſiſtent with the gravity of his character; an exact purity of manners and good-breeding, recommended him to the beſt company; and his abilities ſoon became the ſubject of general obſervation to his brethren in the miniſtry. It may be truly ſaid, that in the general ſynod, which is a very large aſſociation, there was no one more, or as much taken notice of. The greateſt reſpect was paid him from his firſt appearances, as a perſon not only of very uncommon genius,

but of admirable wiſdom and diſcretion, of perfect candor and great modeſty. He ſoon became one of thoſe, upon whom the ſynod moſt depended in the management of public affairs, and had a very large ſhare in it. As a ſpeaker, he was conſidered as their greateſt ornament: And it is very well known, that he maintained his character and eſteem in theſe reſpects, through the whole of that tedious courſe of debates, which afterwards fell in upon the point of chriſtian liberty, even with thoſe, who were the fierceſt antagoniſts to the cauſe he eſpouſed.

When he had been nine years in *Antrim*, he received a call from the diſſenting congregation in *Derry*, who with great earneſtneſs ſollicited his removal thither. He was, indeed, ſo generally admired, that it was natural, the moſt conſiderable congregations ſhould turn their eyes on him, in caſe of a vacancy: But this attempt was without ſucceſs. He thought himſelf very happy in his ſituation at *Antrim*, and that the great ends of his miniſtry might be ſerved as effectually there as any where elſe. He loved his people, and had a pleaſing proſpect

ſpect of ſucceſs among them. The general ſynod, when this matter was debated before them, determined his continuance at *Antrim*.

Soon after this, in the year 1712, his wife, by whom he had a ſon and three daughters, died, which made a very deep and laſting impreſſion upon his mind: He loved her with the greateſt tenderneſs; and, though he bore up under his grief with all poſſible decency, yet there were plain appearances that it was exceedingly intenſe. For a conſiderable time afterwards he choſe retirement from the world, as much as it was conſiſtent with the buſineſs of his ſtation. But whatever he ſuffered upon this occaſion, it was abundantly compenſated, by his apparent growth in knowledge and all virtuous improvements, the beſt proof, that he knew how to receive affliction, and make the proper uſe of it.

He has left behind him a diary of his life, which begins *February*, 1712-13; it makes ſix large volumes in quarto, very ſmall writing, and very cloſe: It is indeed an amazing work; the temper of his mind all along

along repreſented with much exactneſs; the various events he met with, his reflections upon them, and his improvements of them: The whole bearing ſuch characters of a reverence, and awe of the divine preſence upon his mind, of ſimplicity and ſincerity of ſpirit, and the moſt careful diſcipline of the heart, that, how great ſoever his reputation in the world was, it ſhews its real worth rather exceeded it.

This diary begins with a review of his paſt life, even from childhood, and a very careful examination of the preſent moral ſtate of his mind; which takes up many pages, and is too long to be here inſerted. But it diſcovers a ſpirit thoroughly ſenſible of the importance of religion, fully convinced of the truth and divine authority of the religion of Chriſt, and in calling himſelf to an account, not only impartial but ſevere. He ſearches narrowly into his own defects, and writes like one that wrote only for himſelf, laying open the inmoſt of his heart. Then he conſiders the true deſign of chriſtianity by the knowledge of which we are helped to a right underſtanding of the terms of our acceptance with God. He obſerves

obſerves that the very eſſence of faith by which chriſtians are juſtified, conſiſts in a full conſent of ſoul to the goſpel, as containing the will of God for our ſalvation; and in purſuance of that, a chearful and unreſerved ſubmiſſion to the laws of it; the tendency of all which is to purify the heart and life, to deliver men from the ſpirit of this world, that is, from pride, covetouſneſs and all corrupt deſire; to prepare them for the love of God, reſignation to him, confidence and delight in him; and for the performance of all good offices to others with undiſſembled charity. He obſerves that the goſpel is admirably adapted to anſwer theſe ends, not only by the excellency of its laws, but by the love and mercy of God to mankind, and the love of our Saviour, declared in it; by the promiſes of all neceſſary divine aid, and of a happy immortality. Then he repreſents his own ſentiments and temper with reſpect to all theſe things, and towards the concluſion goes on thus; "I have, after calling upon "God, reviewed all that I have written "upon this inquiry; I dare ſay, in his "ſight, that my ſoul approves the deſign "of the goſpel, and heartily concurs with "it.

" it. I can ſay without diſſimulation, after " the bleſſed Pſalmiſt, that *I hate every* " *falſe way*. I dare no more commit ſin " in ſecret, than if I were in the ſight of " the whole world. The deformity of it " appears to my mind loathſome and abo- " minable, and the remaining moral infir- " mities of my ſoul, which no mortal but " myſelf can know, are my greateſt trouble. " I can ſay, my heart is determined to the " love of God, and that I chooſe *the light of* " *his countenance* above all things; that I " love the worſhip of God as the eſtabliſh'd " method of maintaining fellowſhip with " him; that it is habitually my aim to " ſerve the true ends of religious worſhip; " and tho' I often find reaſon to complain " of myſelf, yet I can ſay, I am never eaſy " or ſatisfied with that ſervice, in which I " do not find my ſoul raiſed to a frame " ſome way ſuitable to it, and to ſome fer- " vor of affection. And as charity is a " character of the true diſciples of Chriſt " often ſpoken of in ſcripture, and largely " inſiſted on by our ſaviour, I think, I " can truly ſay, that the image and like- " neſs of God wherever it is found, with- " out regard to party, condition in the world,

" world, or any other conſideration, is the " object of my ſincere affection; my heart " would be glad to do a good office to a " diſciple in the name of a diſciple, and to " do good, as I have opportunity, to all " mankind. What then upon the whole " ſhall I conclude? That, according to the " goſpel declarations, I am in a ſtate of " favour with God? Yes, I will, and muſt " do it. Surely theſe are the genuine cha- " racters of it, according to the ſcriptures. " Therefore condemning myſelf for mani- " fold paſt offences, and adoring the rich " mercy of God, I will ſay to my ſoul, " that I am the object of his approbation " and love." Concluding all with praiſes and thankſgiving in moſt affectionate ſtrains, and with reſolutions of conducting his life for the future ſo as to pleaſe and honour God: particularly with reſpect to his buſineſs as a miniſter, of the dignity and importance of which he expreſſes a high ſenſe, and great pleaſure in it, with earneſt deſires that he may, by the aſſiſtances of God's holy ſpirit, be enabled to anſwer the true ends of that honourable ſtation.

It will, I am perſuaded, be agreeable to many readers, to have ſome farther account of this record of his life, and his progreſs in cultivating good affections, and correcting whatſoever appeared amiſs. But the deſign of this preface does not admit of following him through the particulars of this kind, which would ſwell it to a very great bulk. All that can be expected, is, a general view of the deſigns which he purſued, and his great application to ſerve them; to which it will not be improper to ſubjoin ſome few paſſages which ſhall be faithfully tranſcribed, that the reader may be able to form a juſt idea of his ſpirit. There are indeed very many which there is no occaſion to inſert here, for they contain his reaſonings with himſelf upon religious ſubjects, and theſe are to be found in his ſermons, where they are ſet in the beſt light.

The diſcipline of the heart, is the great buſineſs which he appears in the whole of this diary to have purſued. His inquiries upon particular occaſions into his own infirmities and defects, are very frequent. He relates the workings of his paſſions, thoſe

thoſe eſpecially, which he apprehended had the aſcendant in his natural complexion and temper, and by which he was in the greateſt danger of being betrayed into errors in conduct, with much exactneſs, and many uſeful reflections upon them; with great care applying himſelf to find out the *deceitfulneſs of ſin*, and to diſcover that falſe colouring of principles and affections, which frequently impoſes upon the unthinking and partial, and under the cover of which, bad diſpoſitions and actions often ſhelter themſelves, indeed are recommended as virtuous. And as he was at pains to fortify himſelf by all proper means, againſt whatſoever might endanger that exact integrity which was the ſubject of his conſtant attention and care, ſo where he was conſcious of having failed in any inſtance, he does particularly record it, and his exerciſe of repentance for it. And where he had acted his part happily, and approved himſelf to his own heart, this is likewiſe ſet down with proper reflections for his encouragement and eſtabliſhment in virtue. Never ſure was there a ſcene where the various workings of the human heart, and the proper diſcipline of it, are more fully and affectingly diſplay'd.

He

He likewiſe frequently compares the preſent ſtate of his mind, with what it was in times paſt, carefully obſerving, whether he made advances in religion and virtue, or was falling beneath former attainments; and, as he was for ſome years labouring under frequent depreſſion of ſpirit, tho' concealed from the world, his conflicts with imagination, while it diſtreſſed him, and his reaſonings with himſelf for his ſupport and encouragement, are all ſet forth very particularly.

But there is nothing he attended to with greater exactneſs, than the manner and temper in which he performed the public ſervices of religion. The examining of theſe appears to have been part of his buſineſs every ſabbath-evening; and in the reflections made upon ſuch occaſions, the ſimplicity of his ſpirit in purſuing the true ends of religion and the miniſtry, and his ardent zeal, do moſt affectingly appear. He expreſſes great diſpleaſure with himſelf, when vain or unreaſonable thoughts had inſinuated themſelves ſo, as to leſſen or interrupt his attention to divine things; or when he had not thoſe feelings of devout affection, and of love

love to, and concern for the flock to whom he miniſtred, which he laboured above all things to preſerve upon his mind. But he often reviews theſe ſervices with great ſatisfaction and pleaſure, expreſſing much joy in the exerciſe of the beſt affections and confidence of divine acceptance. In one part of the diary he concludes his reflections with theſe words: "The great difference I "find in my mind, as to clearneſs and con- "fuſion of thought, ſometimes ſeized with "ſuch languor and indiſpoſition, ſuch ſtu- "pidity and barrenneſs, I can have no diſ- "tinct perceptions, I cannot think with "any reliſh; at other times I find ſuch "ſurpriſing vigour and freedom of ſpirit, "ſuch ſtrongly affecting views of thoſe "things, which before were covered with "thick darkneſs, and this attended with "the greateſt pleaſure, that I ſeem to my- "ſelf quite another perſon; this difference, "I ſay, I cannot account for. I know not "the dependance the ſoul has upon the "body, and how far the temper of the "one may be affected by the ſtate of the "other; but for the mind itſelf, ſurely "ſuch changes do not depend upon choice,

" or an act of the will, here another cauſe " muſt be acknowledged."

BESIDES the daily ſervices of the cloſet, it appears from his diary, that he frequently ſhut himſelf up the whole day, which he ſpent in prayer, reading the ſcriptures, and religious meditation. Theſe days he often marks, as very entertaining and uſeful to him; and the exerciſes of his mind, with reſpect to the ſtate of his own ſoul, that of his family, his congregation, and the public intereſt, are all ſet down, in which ſuch a ſpirit of piety and charity breathes, as is rarely to be met with.

THE reader will, I believe, be pleaſed with an account of the reaſons of his ſpending ſo much time in the ſecret exerciſes of devotion, in his own words, which are as follow: " I have reſolved to ſet apart this " day for the ſolemn exerciſes of devotion; " not that I place religion in ſuch things, " for certainly it conſiſts in a conformity of " the habitual diſpoſition of the mind to " the will of God, and an uniform tenor " of converſation. When I was a child in " religion (that is, beginning to be ſerious) " many

" many a danger I was expoſed to, particu-
" larly that of being impoſed upon by a
" warm imagination, laying too great ſtreſs
" upon what I accounted divine impreſſions,
" upon fervours and raptures in religion:
" This, I believe, ſome young and unex-
" perienced chriſtians are apt to fall into;
" but true chriſtianity conſiſts in love to
" God, and charity to men, which is the
" *bond of perfectneſs:* It conſiſts in doing
" juſtly, and loving mercy; in meekneſs
" patience, and contentment. O! my ſoul!
" endeavour to grow in theſe virtues, that
" is the ſure way of pleaſing God; and it
" is eſſentially neceſſary to real religion, that
" a deſign of pleaſing God, be conſtantly
" and uniformly purſued; whenever that is
" neglected, ſincerity is loſt. But I apply
" myſelf to theſe exerciſes, *firſt*, becauſe
" they are a noble employment of the mind,
" moſt worthy of its rational powers, tend-
" ing to their higheſt perfection, and af-
" fording moſt ſolid joy: *Secondly*, in ſo-
" lemn tranſactions with God, I may hope
" for ſuch a confirmation in virtuous ſenti-
" ments and diſpoſitions; and ſuch advan-
" tages over worldly luſts, as may be of
" great uſe to me in future life; and this

" hope is juſtified by experience. *Thirdly*,
" I would lay ſtricter obligations upon my-
" ſelf to greater watchfulneſs and caution
" againſt the ſprings of error, and perplexi-
" ty, and guilt, into which I have been
" formerly miſled, and my life rendered un-
" comfortable."

To all which it may be added, that to his converſing ſo much with himſelf, and theſe extraordinary labours in the cloſet, were, no doubt, in a great meaſure owing, not only the uncommon goodneſs of his ſpirit, and the exact regularity and uſefulneſs of his life; but that intimate acquaintance with the human heart, and thoſe amazing ſtrains of reaſoning, which appear in his ſermons, which could be the effect of nothing but the cloſet, application to thinking, and the moſt careful attention to his own mind.

BESIDES all this, he gives an account, in his diary, of ſeveral alterations of opinion in religious matters, and has been very particular in the reaſons of them; and upon what principles he embraced ſome opinions, contrary to what he had formerly received; and

and in ſeveral places ſets down his reaſonings upon the importance of various articles of faith, as they affect the chriſtian life. One of theſe paſſages concludes thus: "My mind has been often diſturbed about "ſome particular points of orthodoxy; but I "am perſuaded, with that meaſure of know-"ledge God has given me (little, when "compared with the attainments of others) "no miſtake about the chriſtian truth will "deprive me of acceptance, unleſs, which "I hope is not my caſe, it ariſes from ſel-"fiſh iregular deſires, oppoſing the deſign "of chriſtianity itſelf: And the moſt ſub-"ſtantial enjoyment, conformable to the "ſcope of the goſpel, is that ſincere ſatis-"faction, which reſults from a true diſpo-"ſition, to fall in with it univerſally."

It has been already obſerved, that his diary contains an account of all the important events that befel him, with his reflections upon them; his own reſolutions and the principles upon which he founded them. In theſe things he has deſcended very minutely, and made many obſervations upon his own ſchemes in life, and the many diſappointments he met with, which tended

to make his heart better, and to work in him a more finiſhed reſignation to the will of God. Upon occaſion of a conſiderable diſappointment, he writes thus: "A diſ- "paſſionate temper of ſpirit is that only "which will afford me ſolid peace. When "paſſions of any kind prevail, they de- "prive me of comfort, they marr my beſt "ſervices to God; I go about my duty in "bitterneſs, and the heat of my ſpirit, "which I have ſometimes lately found; I "ought therefore to ſummons all my power "to bear them down. Lord, aſſiſt me by *the* "*ſpirit of power, and of love, and of a* "*ſound mind*; and let me ever guard againſt "vain carnal thoughts, the deluſive images "of pleaſure, profit, or honour, and againſt "diſſatisfaction with my preſent ſtate; all "theſe tend to break in upon the ſincerity "and tranquillity of my ſoul. Let me now "put the queſtion; what would I do, if "my circumſtances were altered, according "to the imaginations that have often "amuſed me? I anſwer to myſelf, I would "apply myſelf chearfully to my buſineſs, "as a chriſtian and a miniſter, ſtudying "higher degrees of knowledge, purity, "meekneſs, charity, and every thing vir-

"tuous

" tuous and praiſe-worthy. But am I not
" deceiving myſelf in this? I cannot vindi-
" cate myſelf from ſuch deluſion other-
" wiſe, than by promoting thoſe ends *now*
" to the utmoſt of my capacity. If I do
" not do it *now* to my utmoſt, I ſhould not
" do it *then*; for a mere change in the out-
" ward ſtate will never make the heart bet-
" ter. If I am impatient that things do
" not come to paſs according to my fond
" deſire, and ſanguine imaginations, that is
" my ſin; and if ſuch impatience of ſpirit
" diverts me from my duty, it is a certain
" indication of inſincerity in my profeſſion
" as a chriſtian."

To conclude this general account of his diary, there runs through it a tender ſpirit of ſympathy with his friends: Many of their diſtreſſes are particularly repreſented, and the feelings of his heart, on their account, which ſhew a very delicate ſenſibility in ſuch matters, and made him always ready to do his utmoſt for their ſupport and relief. With ſuch variety of matter, omitting nothing that was of any importance, he carried on the hiſtory of his life, which, tho' manifeſtly intended for his own uſe only,

and therefore written with the greateſt ſimplicity, yet diſcovers in every part of it much ſerious thinking, as well as ſevere ſelf-government.

THE few paſſages I have tranſcribed, in giving the reader this view of the deſign of it, are in the firſt or ſecond volumes; I ſhall now add ſome of his meditations many years after.

" UPON a deſigned conſideration of thoſe " important ſubjects, the methods of di- " vine providence towards me, my own " behaviour, what I ought to do, and how " ſupport myſelf under the calamities of " life, and the fears of death (and, for ſuch " conſideration, I have a good opportunity " this Lord's day, being detained from the " public aſſembly by ſuch an indiſpoſition, " as does not render me incapable of me- " ditating) a great many thoughts ariſe in " my heart. It is of the laſt conſequence, " indeed the foundation of all religion, and " all comfort, to preſerve right ſentiments " concerning the Deity and his providence. " I have given my heart free leave to bring " forth all its objections (and they all turn

" upon

" upon this one point, that they ſeem to
" argue againſt the wiſdom and kindneſs
" of providence to me) for ſurely the prin-
" ciples of religion are not ſuch, as to re-
" quire that any objections againſt them
" ſhould be ſtifled, as being too ſtrong.
" The ſum of my deliberate thoughts, af-
" ter a ſerious enquiry, are, that if in-
" deed the gratifications of ſenſe, of ani-
" mal affections and paſſions, be the per-
" fection and true end of life, I am not
" able to anſwer the objection; for, though
" it is certain, I have many good things
" from God (and, I am perſuaded, there
" is more of them, than evil in my lot;
" and, it may be, the enjoyments I would
" further deſire, might be hurtful to life
" upon the whole) yet I cannot ſay, that
" this amounts to a ſatisfying anſwer. But
" taking life in another view, and conſi-
" dering the human nature, as made for the
" purpoſes of virtue and religion, and for
" the final fruition of God in a perfect
" ſtate, and the objection vaniſhes, there is
" no force at all in it; for then it appears,
" that the main ends of my being are not ob-
" ſtructed, but promoted rather, and ſerved,
" by the very troubles and diſappointments
" complained

" complained of, as experience fully de-
" monſtrates: But that this is a true prin-
" ciple, is apparent, from a fair view of all
" the powers, affections, and enjoyments of
" our nature, taken together; for virtuous
" ſentiments, and affections, and enjoyments,
" are ſo deep wrought into our conſtitu-
" tion, that it is impoſſible to efface them.
" To reſiſt and ſtrive continually againſt
" them, is to make ourſelves compleatly
" miſerable; whereas, to reſiſt the other
" affections and paſſions, affords inward ſe-
" renity and peace; ſo that, upon the con-
" trary principle to that which I now aſ-
" ſert, the human nature would be an un-
" accountable work of God, a heap of ab-
" ſurdities and contradictions, like *the ſha-*
" *dow of death*, without any light or or-
" der. But this principle muſt lie at the
" bottom of all religion, and, I hope, I
" need not ſtill be laying the foundation
" from it, as I am ſatisfied concerning the
" diſpenſations of divine providence toward
" me, ſo I ſee my own faults, which con-
" ſiſt principally in oppoſing and thwarting
" it, ſetting my heart on thoſe things, as
" the principal buſineſs and fruitions of life
" which really are not ſo; and, upon this
" wrong

" wrong ground, conducting my paſſions,
" imaginations, and endeavours: If this be
" my error, return, my ſoul, to the con-
" trary diſpoſition and practice from all thy
" projects and counſels, and conduct all
" thy affairs by this one principle, *that re-*
" *ligious virtue is the true end, and the*
" *higheſt enjoyment of life*; ſo ſhalt thou
" poſſeſs equanimity in all events; ſo ſhalt
" thou enjoy thy own exiſtence with com-
" fort; ſo ſhalt thou be able to ſuppreſs
" tumultuous deſires, perplexing fears, and
" diſcouraging griefs, the ſcandals, weak-
" neſſes, vices, and torments of nature."

In another place, with reſpect to the chriſtian religion, he writes thus; " Many
" are the objections that are raiſed againſt
" chriſtianity. Sometimes they are ſtarted
" in my mind very unſeaſonably, and tend
" to beget an indifference to, and a diſreliſh
" of the goſpel ſcheme: This certainly
" muſt be got over, otherwiſe I can never
" enter into chriſtian exerciſes with that
" ſpirit, and thoſe affections, that become
" me. Still, it muſt be acknowledged that
" ſince it pleaſed God to reveal his will to
" men, he treats them as men; and allows
" them

" them the free uſe of their underſtanding
" in examining it, to diſtinguiſh between
" true and falſe, and to form a right judg-
" ment of what is contained in his word.
" But the foundations upon which I have
" received chriſtianity always appear to my
" moſt deliberate thoughts concerning them,
" firm and unſhaken. I am perfectly ſen-
" ſible they have often appeared ſo in the
" freeſt exerciſe of all my rational powers,
" and in the greateſt, moſt diſpaſſionate
" ſerenity of mind. This farther I am ſure
" of, that my moſt exalted ſentiments of
" virtue and moral perfection, I have been
" led into from a contemplation of the
" rules, views, and motives of the goſpel.
" And tho' there be ſome repreſentations
" and forms of ſpeaking hard to be ac-
" counted for, yet the moſt important
" points, particularly the nature of future
" rewards, as conſiſting in the perfection of
" virtue, are declared according to truth, and
" the nature of things. The deſign of
" Chriſt's coming into the world, his dying,
" riſing, aſcending into heaven, (not as
" darkened by mens explanations and hy-
" potheſes, but in the ſimplicity in which
" theſe points are declared in the New
" Teſtament)

" Teſtament) are amazing effects of Phi-
" lanthropy. And the gift of the holy
" ſpirit, as repreſented in the ſcripture, ſo
" far from being any way ſhocking and ab-
" ſurd, I own, it appears to me moſt
" worthy of God, and a moſt beautiful
" part of the ſcheme. When all theſe
" things are conſidered, I am perfectly ſa-
" tisfied. I conſent to the goſpel covenant.
" I find the greateſt prejudices againſt it at
" bottom, ariſe from the vanity of my own
" heart, and the depravity of my affections.
" I therefore willingly go again to the
" knowledge of Chriſt, that I may learn
" virtue, and upon the ſame foundation on
" which I have begun, and by the ſame
" means, to carry on a war againſt ſin. My
" irregular appetites, my ſelfiſh paſſions,
" have even of late been very vexatious,
" and providence has interpoſed very re-
" markably to controul them. Let diſ-
" content, anger, the love of the things of
" this world, pride, with all fantaſtic and
" unnatural affections, be hated and
" oppoſed. And as I am weak, Lord,
" ſtrengthen me by thy holy ſpirit, that ſo
" the vigour of my mind may be preſerved,
" and I may every day, and by the con-
" tinued

" tinued uſe of prayer, meditation, and
" every ordinance of God, be aſpiring to
" integrity. If I be thus ſeeking glory and
" immortality, eternal life (for what is eter-
" nal life, what is heaven, but the integrity
" and perfection of nature?) is mine. And
" how little ought this world to ſeem in
" my account? How little ſhould I regard
" men and their behaviour towards me? O
" that the bleſſed Jeſus were more in my
" eſteem, and I endeavouring to walk even
" as he walked. I repent of my former
" follies, and I turn to the Lord with all
" my heart.

AGAIN, " God has not framed the
" human nature ſo as to be neceſſarily miſe-
" rable. Nay, ſuch is our conſtitution, that
" the greateſt comfort, the nobleſt enjoy-
" ment, ariſes from our acting agreeably to
" it. That is, from doing conſtantly, and
" uniformly, what our minds approve. One
" would think, now, here is an eaſy and
" ready way to be happy. But indeed the
" doing our duty, acting a reaſonable part,
" conforming our practice to the deliberate
" ſentiments which are the reſult of an im-
" partial inquiry, is rendered difficult by

" our

" our vehement appetites and tumultuous
" paſſions, which darken the mind, per-
" plex its counſels, diſſipate its vigour,
" and, as I often find by experience, pre-
" cipitate men into a raſh and ſinful conduct.
" Yet I find no neceſſity laid upon me to
" be hurrid in that manner, and driven by
" the brutal impulſe of the mechanical
" part of nature. It is in an unhappy
" choice, and in the prevalence of corrupt
" affections, that the guilt conſiſts. How
" wonderfully is the glorious goſpel ſuited
" to this excellent deſign of raiſing the
" mind above all ſervitude to appetites and
" paſſions, and of giving life and ſpirit in
" the performance of duty? There is the
" promiſe of pardon to be the foundation
" of our dutiful return to God, when we
" are conſcious of having offended him.
" There is a promiſe that ſin ſhall not have
" dominion. The aſſiſtance of the holy
" ſpirit is offered. Virtue is recommended
" by a plain and eaſily intelligible law, en-
" forced by a very powerful ſanction. I
" do, therefore, betake myſelf to the re-
" medy the goſpel has provided for me; I
" lay hold of the great ſalvation. I have
" indeed for many years profeſſed to do ſo;

" but

" but have not made the progreſs might
" have been expected over ſin. I therefore
" bemoan myſelf, but what ſhall I do? I
" muſt renew my application to the grace of
" Chriſt. I conſent to the goſpel covenant;
" engaging myſelf, anew, in the ſtrength
" of God to perform all the duties it re-
" quires, and to oppoſe all ſin, thoſe ſins
" eſpecially, which I have found warring
" againſt my own ſoul. And, O! my
" ſoul, return to thy reſt, to a quiet reſignation
" to the will of God, to a firm confidence
" in him, and a cheerful acquieſcence in his
" providence, return to meekneſs, purity,
" and charity.

THIS is all that I ſhall tranſcribe from the diary, excepting what is neceſſary to give the reader a juſt view of Mr. *Abernethy*'s reaſonings with himſelf upon ſome important turns of life, and the principles upon which his reſolutions were founded. To proceed with the account of his life.

HIS behaviour as the head of a family, was, in all reſpects, exemplary. Beſides the daily regular worſhip of God in it (a matter in which he was very exact himſelf, and which

which with the greateſt zeal he recommended to others, accounting it one great cauſe of the decay of religion, ſo juſtly complained of in the preſent age, that family worſhip was ſo much neglected) he ſet a part a day, from time to time, ſeveral hours of which he ſpent with his family, inſtructing his children and ſervants, and praying with them. And he had the teſtimony of all in his houſe, and of all the neighbourhood, to the great meekneſs of his ſpirit, the evenneſs of his temper, and a generous affectionate care of all that were under his roof.

It may be reckoned amongſt his more private labours, that every fortnight, for ſeveral years, he ſpent a day with the members of his ſeſſion, or (as it is ſometimes called) conſiſtory, and as many of the principal perſons in the congregation, as were diſpoſed to attend ſuch ſervice, in prayer and converſation upon uſeful ſubjects. Many of theſe have ſpoken frequently of it ſince, as what was of great advantage to them. Several points in chriſtianity, which are leſs obvious to the unlearned, were freely diſcourſed upon, and every man had opportunity of propoſing his difficulties. But the

converſation always turned principally upon matters relating to practice, and which might tend to edification.

In the public ſervice he followed the rules then uſually obſerved in the north; Expounding ſome portion of ſcripture, and preaching twice every Lord's day. On wedneſday he always preached a ſermon; after which he ſpent ſome time in converſing with the members of the ſeſſion, about the ſtate of the congregation; and inquiring into any public ſcandals, which were laid before them, according to the rules of diſcipline obſerved amongſt the Diſſenters, in which he was very exact.

In the year 1716, in purſuance of a project which had been long in his thoughts, he applied himſelf to labour among the native *Iriſh*, in the neighbourhood of *Antrim*, who were (almoſt univerſally) of the popiſh perſuaſion, to try if their prejudices would be removed, and they might be brought to embrace the proteſtant religion. His heart was very much ſet upon the execution of this deſign; and for a conſiderable time he managed it alone. He went frequently to *Lough-*

Loughſide, a place in the neighbourhood, where the greateſt numbers of them lived; invited them to public lectures, which were appointed in the moſt convenient places for their attendance; went from houſe to houſe among them, and where they would admit of it, converſed freely with them, labouring to convince them of their errors. When he had continued in this courſe ſome time, he had ſuch encouragement from their attendance upon public worſhip, and the good impreſſions made upon ſome of them, that he deſired the aſſiſtance of the miniſters of the neighbourhood in carrying on the deſign, and with their help continued this attempt for a conſiderable time. Sermons were frequently preached, and much time ſpent in private converſation with the *Iriſh*. There is nothing more frequently taken notice of in his diary than this affair, which he often very warmly and affectionately recommends to the divine care and bleſſing. Nor did he ever expreſs greater zeal in any thing, than propagating the true proteſtant principles, and delivering men from papal, and all other eccleſiaſtical tyranny, together with the unhappy prejudices on the one hand, and enſnaring arts on the other, by which it is

ſupported. His labours among the *Iriſh* were not without ſucceſs. Several were prevailed upon and embraced the proteſtant religion. Some of theſe did indeed return to the profeſſion of popery; others continued firm to proteſtant principles, and gave good evidence of being ſincerely religious.

It will appear to the reader from the accounts already given, that Mr. *Abernethy* was a perſon of unwearied application and diligence. But no one who was not well acquainted with him, could imagine how little time he loſt. It appears from his diary, that he very particularly knew the ſtate and character of thoſe who were under his paſtoral care. They had always ready acceſs to him. He carefully viſited the ſick; and his people had ſo high an opinion of his wiſdom, that in all difficulties and perplexing caſes, he was their refuge. He was ready with a moſt friendly ſpirit to aſſiſt in their counſels, and had a very uncommon dexterity in conducting affairs. He thought it not beneath him to ſerve the meaneſt of them, when he had an opportunity of doing good. From this it will be readily concluded

ed that he gave much of his time to his people.

It is likewiſe known, that he had, very early in life, a large ſhare in the management of the public affairs and buſineſs of the diſſenters, and was obliged to be frequently abroad upon that account. His conſtant attendance at the ſtated meetings of his brethren took up much time; and, if any thing happened extraordinary that concerned the public intereſt, he was always called upon as one, upon whoſe diſcretion in counſel, and diligence in execution, his brethren had an intire dependance. And it will appear, from the account to be given immediately, that his engagements and buſineſs of this kind muſt be ſuppoſed greatly to increaſe, when the debates concerning the power of the church, and chriſtian liberty, were brought into the ſynod. He was always looked upon as at the head of that party, which eſpouſed the cauſe of liberty, and had a principal ſhare in conducting the counſels of his friends, with reſpect to the public debates: In the buſineſs of their private ſocieties, he laboured with great diligence, wrote many

papers himſelf upon the controverted points, ſeveral of which were publiſhed, and aſſiſted in thoſe which were publiſhed by his friends.

But beſides all this, he made very great progreſs in learning: The reader will perceive, from the account of his education already given, that he was too much haſtened in it; but he laboured afterwards with ſuch application, that there were few branches of learning, to which he could be called a ſtranger. He had a taſte for the claſſics, and underſtood them; and uſed to recommend the ſtudy of them very warmly to young candidates. He had carefully read the beſt ſyſtematical writers in divinity, and was ſkilful in their controverſies. He was well acquainted with church hiſtory; underſtood the modern improvements in philoſophy, and was not a ſtranger to the various hypotheſes of the antients. He was thoroughly verſed in the principles of natural religion and morality, and had made the principal authors, both antient and modern, upon theſe arguments, perfectly familiar to him: His knowledge in theſe matters beſt appears, from the ſermons he publiſhed

liſhed upon the divine attributes, which have been ſo well received in the learned world, that it is unneceſſary to ſay any thing concerning them.

But above all things, he applied himſelf to the ſtudy of the holy ſcriptures; his thorough acquaintance with which, the reader will ſee in the peruſal of his ſermons: No man could be more happy in pertinent quotations from them; or in explaining the more difficult and controverted paſſages, comparing texts together, and caſting light upon them, by reaſoning from the undoubted principles of religion, in which he had a great dexterity.

But while he was thus employed in the north, and had acquired a very high reputation, he was, in the year 1717, invited by the congregation of proteſtant diſſenters at *Uſher*'s *Quay* in *Dublin*, to be their paſtor, in conjunction with the late reverend Mr. *Arbuckle*, then their ſole paſtor. This affair gave him much trouble. He had contracted a very great affection for his people in *Antrim*, and had ſeen his labours among them ſucceſsful. He highly eſteemed the

ſociety of miniſters in that neighbourhood, and was inexpreſſibly dear to them: It was his own opinion, that he was capable of ſerving the great purpoſes of chriſtianity, and of the diſſenting intereſt in *Antrim*, as effectually as he could in any other ſituation; and thought it extremely hard, that any miniſter ſhould be removed by mere dint of the authority of a ſynod, contrary to the judgment of his own mind. The affair was long depending, and took ſeveral turns, but at the laſt came to a deciſion by the general ſynod, in 1718.

At that time the congregation in *Belfaſt*, uſually called the *Old Congregation*, wanted a miniſter; the reverend Mr. *John Macbride*, their paſtor, was then in a declining ſtate, and unable to go through the miniſterial ſervices; ſo that congregation, while the affair of *Uſher*'s *Quay* was depending, invited Mr. *Abernethy:* And many imagined, that, if he was obliged to leave *Antrim*, it would be more agreeable to him to fix in *Belfaſt* than *Dublin*; and ſome thought it would be more ſerviceable to the common intereſt. The general ſynod, after

ter a long debate among the parties, one for his going to *Dublin*, another for *Belfaſt*, and a third for his remaining at *Antrim*, came to a determination in favour of the firſt.

MR. *ABERNETHY* now found himſelf in a good deal of perplexity; he was exceedingly dear to the congregation of *Antrim*, and they to him: His own judgment was, that his removal was like to be hurtful, rather than ſerviceable to the public intereſt of the diſſenters: At the ſame time a great regard had been always ſhown to ſynodical deciſions; and there was apparent danger of incurring great inconveniencies, by acting in direct contradiction to them. The ſynod had appointed his removal to *Dublin* in three months; during this time, he had frequent conſultations with his friends: Many urged him to comply with the ſynod, and had frightful apprehenſions of the conſequences of ſuch an act of diſobedience to their authority, as his continuing at *Antrim* muſt be. That authority had been generally eſteemed indiſputable, and any thing that was like to weaken, much more to bring it into contempt, was

was look'd upon with great jealouſy: Others convinced that the part the ſynod had acted, was an unjuſt ſtretch of power, were clear for his following his own judgment in the diſpoſal of himſelf. The reſult of his counſels was, to determine nothing finally for the preſent, and to ſhew ſo much reſpect to the ſynodical deciſion, as to pay a viſit to the congregation of *Uſher*'s *Quay*, and ſtay three months with them, that he might have a full view of the ſtate of things in *Dublin*, and come to a concluſion in his own mind, upon the beſt and moſt impartial inquiry he could make. In purſuance of this reſolution he went to *Dublin*, and, after three months ſtay, returned to *Antrim*, with a fixed reſolution of continuing there. As this was the moſt remarkable inſtance, in which the power of the general ſynod was reſiſted, ſo he ſaw it neceſſary, that he ſhould be thoroughly ſatisfied concerning the grounds upon which he went into a meaſure, to the generality ſo very unpopular, to many provoking, and, in the account of ſome, directly criminal. Many of his reaſonings with himſelf upon this ſubject, are written in his diary, in which, after comparing the arguments for and

and againſt his removal, and balancing all things that could be ſuggeſted, he concludes thus: "I have all the encouragement I can "well expect, in the preſent ſtate of the "churches, to continue where I am; I la- "bour among an affectionate people, and "not without hope of ſucceſs: I am per- "fectly ſatisfied, God has bleſſed me in my "miniſtrations here: I have work enough, "and that of the moſt public nature; I can "attend any where: My much eſteemed "brethren in the neighbourhood, who have "the intereſt of the goſpel, and the cauſe of "chriſtian liberty at heart, preſs my continu- "ance among them, to join in the happy "work in which they are engaged; and, I "am convinced, that in this church parti- "cularly, and at this time, it both needs, "and is worthy of all the aſſiſtance I can "give. Theſe arguments prevail, and the "main force of the other (*viz.* for his re- "moval) depends upon ſervile notions of "eccleſiaſtical power, which are attended "with confuſion and fear, but without "light, and they deſtroy a rational choice. "It is my preſent deliberate and full per- "ſuaſion, that no ſynod has any ſuch power, "as that of removing a miniſter from place

"to

" to place without his own conſent; and
" I believe, I ought to make a ſtand againſt
" any ſuch claim. But, O! that I may
" carry with a becoming modeſty, and diſ-
" truſt of my own judgment, ſuch as may
" keep me always open to conviction,
" and the Lord reclaim me when I go
" aſtray."

THE mention made in this paſſage of the cauſe of chriſtian liberty, naturally leads to ſome account of the part Mr. *Abernethy* acted in the long continued debates concerning it in the north, which produced effects, at firſt not at all thought of by the contending parties.

HE had very early in life diſcovered, and been very ſenſible of the pernicious tendencies of a party ſpirit in matters of religion, and of the tyrannical exerciſe of eccleſiaſtical power, in what form or conſtitution ſoever it obtained: He had all along ſet himſelf againſt this; and was, when he had opportunity, either in the public miniſtrations, or in private, very zealous in recommending chriſtian charity: This evidently appeared to be a favourite ſubject of diſcourſe

courſe with him; and he often lamented it, that, when the reformed churches departed from the communion of the church of *Rome*, they carried too much of her ſpirit along with them. He laboured to open and enlarge the minds of chriſtians, by ſhewing, that the points, in which the ſincere might be ſuppoſed to differ, were but of ſmall moment, when compared to the weighty matters, in which all ſuch muſt neceſſarily be of one mind.

SOMETIME before the attempt was made, to remove him to *Dublin*, Doctor *Hoadly*'s (the preſent worthy Biſhop of *Wincheſter*) Sermon, upon the kingdom of Chriſt, with ſeveral of the papers, written in the controverſy, occaſioned by it; particularly, the Biſhop's defence againſt the repreſentation of the committee, were got into the hands of many, and read with great attention, and much pleaſure, by the friends of liberty: But by none of them, with more than Mr. *Abernethy*; who uſed to ſay, that upon the peruſal of theſe books, he thought he could foreſee a glorious day coming, when chriſtians ſhould be joined together, not in the ſame opinions, but in one heart. As that controverſy, by degrees opened, the friends of

of moderation and liberty, had reaſon to rejoice in the viſible ſuperiority the Biſhop had over his antagoniſts, in point of argument; and many were ſet a thinking about theſe matters, who had not much minded them before. A ſpirit of chriſtian liberty and charity, did very remarkably diffuſe itſelf. And upon this occaſion, a conſiderable number of miniſters, and others in the north, formed themſelves into a ſociety, much of the ſame nature, and conſiſting for moſt part of the ſame perſons, with that mentioned in the beginning of this preface. Their deſign was, improvement in uſeful knowledge; and, in order to that, to bring things to the teſt of reaſon and ſcripture, without a ſervile regard to any human authority; a deſign, which muſt be approved by all men of candor, as a good one, and which could not but be very friendly, both to the cauſe of truth and liberty. Mr. *Abernethy* went into this deſign with much zeal: He conſtantly attended the meetings of the ſociety (which, as they were frequently in *Belfaſt*, it being the moſt centrical place, theſe gentlemen came to be called the *Belfaſt*-ſociety) and no man contributed more to the true ends of it.

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SEVERAL miniſters, who at the firſt were members, did ſome time after, when the debates concerning eccleſiaſtical power and chriſtian liberty became very warm, withdraw themſelves from the ſociety: The following (afterwards diſtinguiſhed by the name of non-ſubſcribers) continued to purſue the deſign of it with much diligence; namely, Dr. *James Kirkpatrick*, and Mr. *Samuel Haliday*, both of *Belfaſt*; Mr. *Michael Bruce* of *Hallywood*, Mr. *Thomas Nevin* of *Downpatrick*, Mr. *John Mears*, then of *Newtown*, Mr. *Harper*, then of *Moyza*, Mr. *John Henderſon* of *Dunane*, Mr. *Thomas Shaw* of *Ahghill*, Mr. *William Taylor* of *Carncaſtle*, Mr. *Joſias Clugſton* of *Larne*, Mr. *Thomas Wilſon* of *Ballyclare*: Of theſe, Meſſieurs *Kirkpatrick*, *Haliday*, *Bruce*, *Shaw*, *Taylor* and *Harper*, are ſince removed by death. As they were Mr. *Abernethy*'s intimate friends, and conſtant members of the *Belfaſt*-ſociety, it will not probably be unacceptable to the reader, to give him a ſhort account of their characters.

DR. *KIRKPATRICK* was a perſon of a very great compaſs of knowledge: He had

had been in his youth induſtrious in his ſtudies; and, with a very quick apprehenſion, he had a memory ſo ſtrong and faithful, that he loſt very little of what he had read. He was ſkilful in the languages and claſſical learning, which he ſo retained, that to the laſt, when upwards of ſixty, he could ſpeak in the latin tongue with eaſe and fluency, though his buſineſs in life did not call him to any particular care to preſerve it. He underſtood the philoſophy, which was taught in the univerſities at the time he attended his ſtudies in them; and had made great progreſs in divinity, eſpecially in the polemic part, in which he was thought to excel. When he appeared in the world as a preacher, he was highly eſteemed; and his thorough knowledge of the preſbyterian conſtitution, and all the rules of that diſcipline, in which he was very exact, made him very uſeful to the ſynod. He all along retained an active temper, and induſtrious in ſtudy: He made himſelf well acquainted with the late improvements in natural philoſophy, and had a genius capable of moſt conſiderable advances in any branch of learning; ſo that in the decline of life, having applied himſelf

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to the ſtudy of phyſic, and taken the degree of doctor (which degree he took likewiſe in divinity) he practiſed as a phyſician, ſeveral years before his death. He was a moſt zealous advocate for the juſt liberties of chriſtians greatly uſeful to the *Belfaſt*-ſociety, and was the author of ſeveral papers which they publiſhed in their controverſies with the general ſynod. He was of a mind conſtant and reſolved, not to be moved by clamor and importunity, or unjuſt reproach. He had a very great knowledge of the world, and a good judgment in affairs. He had the intereſts of religion very much at heart, and upon all proper occaſions diſcovered a moſt zealous ſpirit. He was a laborious and conſtant preacher; but frankly acknowledged to his friends, that he did not beſtow much thought or time upon exactneſs of ſtile or compoſition, thinking it enough, if the ſentiments were juſt and plainly expreſſed, calculated to anſwer the great ends of preaching, in ſolemn addreſſes to the conſciences of men. He was a perſon, through the whole of life, of ſtrict ſobriety and temperance. He ſpoke and argued with much ſtrength and judgment; and was, withal, a

man of a cheerful ſpirit, affable and courteous to all, and, upon proper occaſions, could entertain and divert his friends with much true humour.

MR. *HALYDAY* was a gentleman, who had the advantages of a very liberal education, and of ſpending ſome years in travelling through *Europe*. He was an excellent ſcholar, and of a polite taſte. He had frequent opportunities of advancing himſelf another way, but, from mere principle, choſe to be a diſſenting miniſter. He was moſt zealous for the cauſe of liberty, and a great enemy to all unjuſt encroachments upon it, under whatſoever pretence. He had ſtudied divinity with diligence, but eſpecially the popiſh controverſies; and, as he thoroughly underſtood the principles upon which the reformation was founded, ſo he was very jealous of all appearances of biggotry, and an impoſing ſpirit, as utterly inconſiſtent with them. His ſettlement in *Belfaſt*, which was a little after the debates in the north began, met with conſiderable oppoſition from ſome, who were zealous for what they accounted the juſt authority of the church, and for the method which had been

been for ſome years before purſued, of requiring ſubſcription to the *Weſtminſter confeſſion* of faith from intrants into the miniſtry. This gave occaſion to his writing a book, containing his reaſons againſt the impoſition of ſuch ſubſcriptions, which has been thought by many, one of the beſt books upon that argument. Mr. *Haliday* lived in very great eſteem; for, as he had much of the gentleman in his behaviour, ſo his life and manners were worthy of his character as a miniſter. He was a perſon of warm affections, and a very ſincere friend. A moſt correct preacher, but all his diſcourſes were eaſy and plain: The great principles of practical religion were his main topics, and to ſerve the true ends of chriſtianity, his conſtant aim.

Mr. *Bruce* was a man of uncommon worth, and as uncommon modeſty. He had a clear underſtanding and ſound judgment. No man could argue with greater force, or ſet things in a ſtronger, or more convincing light; ſo that his reaſoning was often found quite irreſiſtible, even when his hearers had been ſtrongly and long prejudiced againſt the truth. He was a principal

manager in the public debates, and was much regarded; for as he was an excellent ſpeaker, ſo the perfect candor of his ſpirit, which in the whole of his conduct was ſo apparent as to raiſe him quite above ſuſpicion, made him univerſally beloved: Even the greateſt adverſaries to his cauſe could not but admire him. He was of no party farther than his regard to truth and virtue made him of it. He was a great maſter in natural religion, and in the arguments which ſupport the authority of the chriſtian religion, to which he did great honour by a converſation worthy of it. He was a perſon quite above the ſpirit of the world, and ſeemed to have no ſolicitude at all about his circumſtances in it. No man eaſier about himſelf, but the good and benevolent affections ſo reigned in him, that to do good to others was his conſtant buſineſs and ſtudy. And no one manifeſted a greater reverence for his creator, and care to pleaſe him in all things. A fixed perſuaſion of the perfect wiſdom and goodneſs of God, and that all events are under the direction of his providence, begot ſuch an habitual calm and tranquillity in his mind, that he was not to be ſhaken even by moſt afflicting occurrences.

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He was a moſt acceptable preacher, and had a wondrous faculty of expreſſing himſelf, even upon the moſt difficult and abſtracted ſubjects, in a manner that was plain and eaſy to the apprehenſion of his hearers. And his way of thinking was ſo clear, and his memory ſo ſtrong, that tho' he did not write his ſermons (which his friends now regret as a very ſenſible loſs) yet he delivered himſelf in a correct ſtyle, and without any confuſion. He was capable of riſing into great warmth, but the moſt diſtant poſſible from the unreaſonable wildneſſes of enthuſiaſm. His ſtrong reaſoning, enlivened by the zeal of his ſpirit, (which never diſcovered itſelf but in matters truly important) made deep impreſſions upon his hearers. It was apparent he felt the power of the ſacred truth which he taught: And as he was a man of the greateſt ſimplicity of ſpirit in declaring the truth, ſo he was of the greateſt firmneſs in defending it; not to be ſway'd by any authority, or daunted by any oppoſition.

Mr. *Taylor* was a man of ſound judgment, and very conſiderable knowledge. He was a weighty ſpeaker, and could mix the argumentative and pathetic very agree-

ably. A man of a bold and reſolved ſpirit, and who could not give way to any human authority in religious matters, but followed ſteadily the conviction of his own judgment. He was a laborious and ſerious preacher. He beſtowed much pains in compoſing his ſermons, and always ſtudied to do honour to his ſtation and character. He maintained a great and firm mind in very afflicting circumſtances, which attended an unweildy body, and full of diſorders, for many years. This confined him much, and rendered him incapable of thoſe ſervices for which he was in other reſpects very well qualified. He was much eſteemed in the *Belfaſt*-ſociety, and very zealous in their cauſe.

Mr. *Shaw* was a gentleman who could not be known without being beloved. He had an education ſuitable to his genteel parentage. He had the greateſt ſweetneſs and cheerfulneſs of temper, happily joined with a gravity which became his character, and ſat eaſy upon him. He was much and juſtly admired for prudence and diſcretion in his conduct. Not haſty in reſolving, and very diligent to ſatisfy himſelf thoroughly in the reaſons upon which he acted. But

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of a firm mind, and not to be put out of his courſe, when his reaſon was convinced. He was formed for friendſhip, having great generoſity, tenderneſs, purity, and conſtancy of ſpirit. He laboured in his work as a miniſter with much diligence and affectionate concern for his people. His life was, in all reſpects exemplary. He was the delight of his friends, and could ſcarcely have an enemy.

Mr. *Harper* was diſtinguiſhed by great piety and tenderneſs of affection. He had attained to a conſiderable degree of learning in the languages and philoſophy, as well as divinity. His ſermons were full of the pathetic, which was natural to him, and without any affectation. He had a delicacy in his temper and paſſions, which was in ſome reſpects uneaſy to himſelf, but amiable to his friends, with whom he rejoiced or ſuffered, as their circumſtances gave occaſion, above moſt men. He had the intereſts of true religion greatly at heart, and was content to bear perſonal inconveniencies not a little grievous to him, rather than forſake that party which he believed had truth and reaſon on their ſide.

I SAY nothing of meſſieurs * *Nevin*, *Wilſon*, *Clugſton*, *Henderſon*, and *Mears*,

* Mr. *Nevin*'s death happened ſince this preface was written. He was a man of great abilities, and indefatigable induſtry and activity. Exceedingly zealous for the juſt liberties of mankind, and warm in oppoſing all pretences to power in matters of religion and conſcience. In the courſe of the debates between the *Synod* and *Nonſubſcribers*, a particular charge was brought againſt him, for ſome things he had ſaid in private converſation, which were thought inconſiſtent with ſome important articles of the chriſtian faith. In the *Synod* which met at *Dungannon*, 1724, the matter was brought to a public trial; and iſſued, not in a deciſion upon evidence, but in requiring Mr. *Nevin* to make a declaration of his faith concerning the ſupreme deity of Chriſt. This he would not ſubmit to, for many reaſons which he urged againſt ſuch a method of proceeding, as holding an inquiſition upon him, and a direct violation of the common rights of mankind: Upon which he was excluded from the *Synod*. The *Nonſubſcribers* proteſted againſt this, and gave in their reaſons, which are printed with Mr. *Nevin*'s trial publiſhed by himſelf. His defence, to which the reader is referred, though made under great diſadvantages, very much raiſed his character, even in the *Synod* as well as without doors, ſhewing great eloquence and ſtrength of reaſon. He continued, notwithſtanding his excluſion, to maintain his reputation amongſt his friends at *Downpatrick*; and when the *Nonſubſcribers* were erected into a ſeparate Preſbytry, became a member with them.

He was an eloquent and acceptable preacher, and delivered himſelf in the pulpit with great life. He had truly generous diſpoſitions, and was ready to ſerve his friends at the expence of any labour to himſelf. As this engaged him in many affairs, ſo he came to acquire a conſiderable knowledge in civil matters, and was exceedingly ſerviceable in the neighbourhood by his advice and

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who are ſtill alive. However, it can be no diſadvantage to their characters, that they were of this ſociety. As ſuch a ſet of men, to ſay the leaſt, is rarely to be met with, ſo no doubt the methods they purſued in the meetings of their ſociety for mutual improvement, were a great means of their being qualified for the reputable appearance they made in the world, and the important ſervices to which they were called.

MANY had begun very ſoon to conceive a great jealouſy of this ſociety. It was whiſpered about, that theſe men aimed at great alteration, in the church. That they had given up ſome articles of religion which had been looked upon as of great importance, and that they were about to lay aſide the *Weſtminſter Confeſſion* of faith (which had been always regarded in the north, with great veneration, and to which from the year 1705, in purſuance of an act of the *Synod*, ſubſcription had been required of

and intereſt, and by arbitrating in caſes referred to him. He beſtowed much time and pains in ſuch ſervices, and by degrees became much more involved in buſineſs than himſelf or his friends could have wiſhed, but raiſed himſelf to high eſteem with perſons of rank and diſtinction in that country.

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intrants into the miniſtry) from being the teſt of orthodoxy.

It was a cuſtom with the *Belfaſt*-ſociety, at their meetings, to have a ſermon preached upon ſome article of natural, or revealed religion. Mr. *Abernethy*, at their deſire, preached one upon *Rom.* xiv. 5. *Let every man be fully perſuaded in his own mind.* In this he explained the rights of private judgment, and the foundations of chriſtian liberty, very much to the ſatisfaction of his hearers. The ſermon was publiſhed, and has been eſteemed an excellent performance: But it greatly increaſed the jealouſies which were then growing up. Some favourite points reſpecting church power, and the terms of chriſtian communion, were ſtruck at in it, and a very great cry was raiſed. Some papers were publiſhed againſt it, and the ſociety publiſhed defences of it: But I do not mean to give the reader a hiſtory of the debates and controverſies which followed upon this. They were ſoon brought into the general *Synod*, and continued from year to year, ſtill increaſing till they ended in an unhappy rupture in the year 1726; the *Synod* at laſt, determining

determining that thoſe miniſters, who, at the time of this rupture, and for ſome years before, were known by the name of *Nonſubſcribers*, ſhould be no longer of their body. I do not mean, I ſay, to write a hiſtory of theſe debates (there is a very full one in the *narrative* publiſhed by the *Nonſubſcribers*, to which I refer the reader) but only to give a ſhort account of the part Mr. *Abernethy* acted in them, and of his ſentiments concerning them. Yet it may not be improper, for the ſake of ſuch readers as are altogether ſtrangers to theſe matters, to ſhew what the avowed principles of the *Nonſubſcribers* were, about which the controverſy was raiſed. Theſe principles are contained in ſome propoſitions publiſhed in their *Narrative*, which may be abridged in a very few words, *viz.* *Firſt*, That our Lord Jeſus Chriſt hath in the New Teſtament determined and fixed the terms of communion in his church. That all chriſtians who comply with theſe, have a right to communion; and that no man, or ſet of men, have power to add any other terms to thoſe ſettled in the goſpel. *Secondly*, That it is not neceſſary, as an evidence of ſoundneſs in the faith, that candidates for the miniſtry

miniſtry ſhould ſubſcribe the *Weſtminſter* Confeſſion, or any uninſpired form of articles, or confeſſion of faith, as the term upon which they ſhall be admitted. And that no church has a right to impoſe ſuch ſubſcription upon them. *Thirdly*, That to call upon men to make declarations concerning their faith, upon the penalty of cutting them off from communion, if they ſhould refuſe it; and this merely upon ſuſpicions and jealouſies, while the perſons required to purge themſelves by ſuch declarations, cannot be fairly convicted upon evidence, of any error or hereſy, is to exerciſe an exorbitant and arbitrary power, and is really an inquiſition. Theſe are the main principles of the *Nonſubſcribers*. They will be found explained at large in their narrative, from *pag.* 185, to 188.

But the reader is not to imagine, that all the miniſters of the ſynod denied all theſe propoſitions, and held the contradictory to them: For, with reſpect to the firſt, tho' it is the main foundation upon which the *Nonſubſcribers* built, yet it is what all agree in; no one pleading, that there is any power in the church to make new

new laws or terms of communion; tho' it has been often pleaded, that church judicatories have authority to judge concerning the ſenſe and meaning of thoſe terms which our Saviour has fixed. But the main debates were concerning the other propoſitions; and the reader will readily conjecture, that, with reſpect to theſe likewiſe, all who were of the ſubſcribing ſide, might not be of one mind in every particular, eſpecially as to the importance of them: But they univerſally went into the demand of ſubſcription, which the others oppoſed.

ALL who know any thing of church-hiſtory, know, that no debates in the world have been keener or more obſtinate, than thoſe concerning matters of religion. The natural paſſions of the human heart are greatly enflamed by zeal, for what is believed to be the cauſe of truth and of God; and intemperate heat may eaſily paſs upon the partial and leſs diſcerning, and be indulged as a highly commendable virtue. The debates in the general ſynod, and in other aſſemblies of miniſters upon the preſent occaſion, were very warm, and abundantly fruitful of moſt unhappy conſequences.

BEFORE

BEFORE the affair was brought into the ſynod, Mr. *Abernethy*, who was always looked upon as at the head of the *Non-ſubſcribers*, had, by his uncommon abilities, and as uncommon eminency as a chriſtian, acquired a moſt eſtabliſhed reputation. He was, indeed, eſteemed by many to a degree, which could hardly be due to any man: This gave him great advantage in theſe controverſies; no man had more, or as much authority. The other members of the *Belfaſt*-ſociety, as the Reader will form ſome notion of their abilities, from what has been ſaid above, ſo were men of unblameable lives; and indeed nothing, without remarkable purity of manners, would have ſupported them againſt the torrent of prejudice, which they had, at firſt eſpecially, to wreſtle with; their ſide of the queſtion was moſt unpopular, and the clamor raiſed againſt them almoſt univerſal: And the reader will, without being particularly informed, readily imagine many perſonal inconveniencies which thoſe, who upon ſuch occaſions are on the unpopular ſide, muſt ſuffer.

MR.

MR. *ABERNETHY* had the greateſt ſhare, both in conducting the counſels of the *Nonſubſcribers*, and managing their public debates; and he, with ſome others of that ſociety, acquired extraordinary reputation for ſound judgment and eloquence. He was particularly diſtinguiſhed by an evenneſs and conſtancy of temper, which nothing could ruffle or diſcompoſe: He was always himſelf, and free from thoſe tumults and agitations of ſpirit, which are often ſeen to deprive men of the uſe of very eminent abilities; let the ſpirit of ſtrife and contention rage ever ſo much in the ſynod, he ſeemed to catch nothing of the infection: His mind always ready and clear in judging, and his utterance eaſy and free: He has often ſpoken *extempore* for a long time together, in the greateſt warmth of debate, with ſuch pertinency, temper and fluency of expreſſion, as, while it ſurprized the hearers, commanded their reſpect and attention. A great vivacity and quickneſs of apprehenſion, a perfect preſence of mind, with a penetrating judgment, happily qualified him for the part he had to act in theſe aſſemblies, which was ſo much the eaſier

eaſier to him, that he had a clear, ſtrong, and agreeable voice: If his cauſe was diſliked, the perſon that pleaded it with ſuch advantage, could not but be admired; and, as he acted from a thorough perſuaſion of the righteouſneſs and great importance of the cauſe of liberty, ſo he proceeded in the defence of it, with a reſolution and boldneſs which became one who had nothing but truth and right in his aim.

THE truth is, he and his friends of the *Belfaſt*-ſociety found themſelves involved in great difficulties; many, who ſet themſelves to oppoſe them with violence, were men much, and juſtly celebrated for learning and great piety; and, without doubt, acted from a principle of zeal for God: And, in aſſemblies conſtituted as the ſynod is, there will always be a conſiderable part, which cannot enter deeply into the merits of ſuch a cauſe, but will be ſwayed by great names, and follow them in all their meaſures, eſpecially when religion is apprehended to be at ſtake, and the foundations of it undermined, which notion greatly prevailed upon this occaſion amongſt the leſs diſcerning; ſo that it is not to be wondered

dered at, that the *Nonſubſcribers* were looked upon with great jealouſy, and that prejudices, quite invincible by reaſon, were laid in againſt all that they could ſay. The populace, in moſt places, conceived a great diſlike to them and their miniſtrations; and to this the authority of the ſynod (however ſincere their aims and intentions might be, which I do not at all call in queſtion) very much contributed. Popular reproaches fell as heavily upon Mr. *Abernethy*, as any man; and he was by many as much diſliked and evil ſpoken of, as he had been formerly celebrated and admired; but ſo did he conduct himſelf through the whole of this controverſy, that, neither in the ſynod, nor out of it, did he give his adverſaries any advantage againſt him, or the leaſt occaſion of enmity. His character for diſcretion, candor, and greatneſs of mind, amongſt all that knew him, and could judge, he ſtill maintained: And, for himſelf, it was enough to him, that he did juſtice to his cauſe and his own conſcience; the perſonal inconveniencies which followed upon his attachment to the cauſe of liberty, did not move him: And he can hardly appear to the reader in a more amiable light, than by

imagining him in a few years, from the moſt admired character, and celebrated preacher in the north, become the object of jealouſy and reproach, forſaken by a conſiderable number, even of the people of his own congregation, and all the while preſerving an equal temper, without doing any thing which ſpoke reſentment againſt others, or diſquietude in his own mind.

And his brethren of the *Belfaſt*-ſociety, or preſbytry of *Antrim* (for having been formerly of differnt preſbytries, they were, by an act of the ſynod, ſome time before the rupture, joined together in one) had not only great ſatisfaction in him as a member, but, when things came to a criſis, and ſome miniſters were like to ſuffer deeply for being of this party, his preſence and converſation were a moſt powerful ſupport to their minds; he did not only preſerve an eaſy cheerful ſpirit himſelf, but had a very peculiar faculty of infuſing it into others; and, as he always maintained an even temper, ſo he was moſt patient of labour and application; not at all haſty in his ſpirit, or diſcouraged from renewing his attempts by frequent diſappointments; for, while things

things were not quite desperate, he continued labouring to do good, and to heal the breaches that were made, with a constant mind. Difficulties did not daunt him, nor vexatious scenes of wrathful contention and disputation make him impatient. The observation of *Solomon* was admirably exemplified in him: *A wise man is strong, and a man of knowledge increaseth strength.*

He constantly laboured against any breach, either of ministerial or christian communion, on account of the present controversies. With this view, when jealousy and discord were grown to a very great height, and a rupture was threatned, he wrote a paper intitled; *Seasonable advice to the contending parties in the north*, which was published with a preface, by the reverend Messieurs *Weld*, *Boyse*, and *Chappin*, of *Dublin*. The intention it pursues from beginning to end, is to prove, that there ought to be no breach of communion amongst the protestant dissenters in the north, on account of the late different sentiments and practices relating to subscription to the *Westminster* confession. This paper was anonymous; for Mr. *Abernethy*

imagined it might be more uſeful that it was not known to come from him, who was not looked upon by all, as very zealous, and the principal advocate for liberty. The paper was ſometime after anſwered by the reverend Mr. *Maſterton*. His anſwer was pretty large. Mr. *Abernethy* replied in a book, to which he prefixed his name, acknowledging himſelf the author of the *ſeaſonable advice*. To this reply there was a poſtſcript by the above-named miniſters of *Dublin*, anſwering what related to them. I ſhall ſay nothing concerning theſe performances, the world muſt judge: With this the controverſy between Mr. *Abernethy* and Mr. *Maſterton* ended; but the ſtate of things grew worſe and worſe; people in many places were ſeparating from the *Nonſubſcribing* miniſters, and ſome of theſe miniſters were very much reproached, as utterly unſound in their religious principles, of which Mr. *Abernethy* bore a large ſhare; but nothing could put him ſo out of humour, as to divert him from ſtudying by all means to prevent a ſcandalous breach of communion.

SOME

SOME of his reflections upon that melancholy ſtate of affairs, and his own particular concernment in it, are as follow: " *O! my ſoul wait on the Lord, and be of* " *good courage, and he ſhall ſtrengthen thine* " *heart.* It pleaſes God to exerciſe me with " a variety of trials; but, *tho' I am troubled* " *almoſt on every ſide, I am not diſtreſſed,* " *I am perplexed, but not in deſpair.* When " I reflect on the times which are paſt, " the troubles and temptations which have " environed me, together with the divine " vouchſafements in that ſtate, I am com- " forted; for in faithfulneſs God has af- " flicted me, and has never forſaken me. " I have been made to rejoice in tribula- " tions, for they have work'd ſome in- " creaſe of patience, experience and hope; " therefore let me *account it all joy, when* " *I fall into divers temptations:* And what " have I now to be ſollicitous about? For, " after all, that which produces inquietude " and careleſneſs of mind, attended with " confuſion and pain, is an exceſſive re- " gard to ſome preſent intereſt; for de- " bates in my mind meerly about duty, if " nothing elſe be mixed with them, are

" calm and diſpaſſionate; it is ſtill ſomething
" ſelfiſh which produces perturbation. I
" find myſelf, in my preſent circumſtances,
" too deeply concerned for my reputation,
" which many are inclined fiercely to run
" upon, becauſe another reputation, to which
" they are attached, ſeems to be affronted
" by the reſiſtance now made. This is a
" worldly intereſt, which I am called to reſign
" and commit to God without anxiety; all
" that I am to ſtudy, is, that I may be
" approved of God, leaving to his kind and
" faithful providence all that concerns me:
" Theſe things I muſt ſeek after; *firſt*,
" that the free exerciſe and compoſure of
" my mind may be preſerved; for when
" either anger or fear, worldly ſorrow or
" carnal affection prevail, this is deſtroyed,
" and even my ſincerity hurt. 2*dly*, That
" the more I am tempted, the greater ad-
" vantages I may obtain, I mean eſpecially,
" an increaſe of patience, and all the other
" peaceable fruits of righteouſneſs. 3*dly*,
" That my ſervices to the church, and
" the precious intereſts of religion, may
" abound more and more. My miniſtry
" is the main buſineſs of my life; and
" therefore, to be more diligent, faith-
" ful

" ful and ſucceſful in it, is the point I ought
" to aim at, as a proper improvement of all
" my afflictions."

AGAIN, " an important ſubject of my
" ſerious conſideration, is, the diſcord a-
" mong miniſters, and people of our de-
" nomination, which, if not timely reme-
" died, may have very diſmal effects. The
" peace of the church is to be deſired by all,
" who love our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and by
" all lawful means to be purſued; but a
" departure from the goſpel foundations of
" peace, can never be juſtified. To make
" profeſſions againſt the light of my own
" conſcience, ſeems to me a moſt heinous
" impiety; in the mean time, there is not
" any thing I am more in danger of, than
" the ſecret influence of corrupt motives,
" eſpecially an undue love of reputation,
" fear of reproach, and the diſeſteem of
" men, who, I am ſenſible, act from
" an intemperate and ill informed zeal
" for what they think truth: This puts
" on the diſguiſe of prudent caution
" and care to preſerve my uſefulneſs
" in the miniſtry; but let me always
" remember, that my uſefulneſs, and the

" reputation neceſſary to it, is to be com-
" mitted to God, and reſigned to him,
" never to be preſerved by any ſinful com-
" pliances on my part. *Lord, let integri-*
" *ty and truth preſerve me, for I wait on*
" *thee.*"

UPON another occaſion; " The ſuffi-
" ciency of the ſcriptures to the purpoſes
" of a divine revelation, and the right of
" private judgment, are the ſtable princi-
" ples of proteſtantiſm, in which we ought
" to glory: But it is ſtrange, what pre-
" judices there are in the minds of many
" proteſtants againſt them, as if they led
" to licentiouſneſs. This ſeems to proceed
" from a wrong idea of religion, as if it
" conſiſted in a ſet of notions, pretended
" to be the determinate ſenſe of ſcripture;
" whereas, indeed, it conſiſts in forming
" our ſentiments and practice on the ſole
" authority of God, which can never be
" without liberty, I mean, from human
" deciſions and ſanctions. This doctrine
" was the ſubject of my public diſcourſes
" this day; and it is what I muſt ſtand
" by, as I expect to be approved of by my
" great maſter, who will not acquit me,
" if

" if I ſhall endeavour to transfer the faith " of his diſciples from his own word to " human decrees.' And ſhall I ever dare " to trifle or prevaricate in religious pro- " feſſions? Shall I be intimidated in doing " my duty to God, and in maintaining the " rights of conſcience, by an expreſſive re- " gard to the opinions of men? The pre- " tence of preſerving my uſefulneſs is really " a ſham. Is that to be preſerved at the " expence of liberty and truth? But in this " great affair I have my weakneſſes to afflict " me. Lord, *ſtrengthen me with might by thy* " *ſpirit in the inner man.*"

AGAIN, " It has pleaſed God often to " try me with difficulties in the exerciſe of " my miniſtry. I have met with ill-uſage " from many. I have been, I think, ill- " treated by ſome of my brethren; and, " now, contention is riſen up to a deſtruc- " tive height among them. What the effects " of ſome late proceedings may be, I can- " not tell. But ſome have puſhed matters " of debate with ſuch vehemence, as is like " to render ſome miniſters exceedingly ob- " noxious to the cenſures of an unthinking " multitude, and thereby to mar their uſe- " fulneſs.

" fulneſs. I pray God this may not be
" laid to the charge of any. For myſelf,
" I deſire, firſt of all, to examine my own
" conduct. And, I thank God, I rejoice
" in the teſtimony of an unreproaching
" heart. Nor could I have acted otherwiſe
" without a gainſaying, at leaſt a doubt-
" ing mind. And let it never enter into
" my heart to practiſe the arts of diſſimu-
" lation, and make ſuch baſe compliances
" as even *ſeem* to be inconſiſtent with the
" prerogative of Jeſus Chriſt, as king of
" his church, or the ſacred rights of his
" ſubjects. My reputation I will commit
" cheerfully to God, without endeavouring
" to preſerve it by any ſinful methods. In
" theſe and all other trying circumſtances,
" *by returning and reſt I ſhall be ſaved, in*
" *quietneſs and confidence ſhall be my ſtrength.*"

As matters went on towards an open rupture amongſt the miniſters, ſo the clamors and diſtractions among the people grew more and more offenſive. New congregations were erected in ſeveral places, of ſuch as ſcrupled attending upon the miniſtrations of *Nonſubſcribers*. And miniſters of that denomination found every where great difficulties

difficulties ariſing from the jealouſies ſpread among their people. The reputation which Mr. *Abernethy* had acquired, and which was eſtabliſhed by a long courſe of a moſt exemplary life, was no ſecurity to him from theſe. Some of his people forſook his miniſtry, and went to other congregations. And in ſome time the number of the ſcrupulous and diſſatisfied ſo increaſed, that they were by the miniſters of the *Synod* erected into a diſtinct congregation, and called a miniſter.

MR. *Abernethy*, in the whole courſe of this affair carried it with the greateſt modeſty. He had been long held in the higheſt eſteem by many who now forſook him; and it was not a ſmall trial of his virtue to bear every thing he met with patiently, and with the uſual compoſure of his ſpirit. Many are the grave and ſerious reflections he makes upon this turn of affairs in his diary. But there are ſome tender points which forbid the publiſhing of them.

THERE happened about this time, a vacancy in the congregation of *Wood-ſtreet*, by the death of one of their paſtors, the late

late reverend Mr. *Boyle*; and the people gave Mr. *Abernethy* an invitation to ſucceed him. Many circumſtances concurred to incline him to accept of that invitation, and it was the opinion of moſt of his friends, that his removal to *Dublin* would be of real ſervice to the diſſenting intereſt. But he found difficulty in the proſecution of this deſign, ariſing principally from the ſtate of his congregation at *Antrim*. The far greater part of the old congregation had adhered firmly to him, and retained as high an eſteem of him as ever: And if he ſhould leave them unſettled in that time of diſtraction, he imagined the conſequences might be very bad. He reſolved therefore to accept of the invitation from *Wood-ſtreet*, only upon condition, his people of *Antrim* ſhould be ſatisfied, and actually provided with a ſucceſſor. This he publickly declared as a proper expreſſion of his regard for them. In ſome time they came into the choice of a miniſter to ſucceed him, upon which he declared his acceptance of the call from *Wood-ſtreet*, and immediately removed thither.

The concern of mind with which he entered upon with this charge, and his ſolicitude

licitude that he might perform the ſervice of it in a reputable and ſucceſsful manner, are expreſſed in his diary in very ſtrong terms; which ſhews how naturally great modeſty and great worth dwell together. Such modeſt expreſſions, and which ſpeak ſelf-diffidence, uttered in converſation, often paſs unheeded, as having very little meaning in them, and which are ſometimes uſed by the moſt petulant and aſſuming. But to meet with ſuch expreſſions where a man is communing only with his own heart, cannot but greatly engage the readers affection. Some little time after his ſettlement in *Dublin*, he married miſs *Boid*, daughter of Mr. *John Boid* of *Rathmore* near *Antrim* (a gentleman of character and fortune) with whom he lived in all the tenderneſs of conjugal affection to his Death.

It appears from the account given of the foregoing part of his life, that Mr. *Abernethy* was a perſon of great induſtry and diligence in the proper labours of his ſtation, and very careful in improving his time to the beſt purpoſes. When he came to *Dublin*, tho' he was there in that ſtage of life in which many think they may be excuſed

excuſed from laborious application to ſtudy, yet he gave himſelf to reading, meditation, and the compoſing of ſermons, with as great induſtry as ever. He wrote all his ſermons at full length, all legible, and it appears that he compoſed one almoſt every week.

In the year 1733, the diſſenters, upon the encouragement they had got from ſome perſons of diſtinction on the other ſide the water, and ſtrong aſſurances, that a conſiderable number of members of parliament in this kingdom would be upon their ſide, propoſed to move the houſe of commons for a bill to repeal the ſacramental teſt act. When this project was firſt formed, Mr. *Abernethy* wrote a paper to ſhew the unreaſonableneſs and injuſtice of all ſuch laws, as upon account of mere differences in religious opinions and uſages incapacitate ſubjects, in other reſpects perfectly qualified for it, to ſerve their country in places of power or truſt; and cut them off from privileges and advantages to which, as free born ſubjects, they have a natural and juſt title; and particularly, that in the preſent ſtate of *Ireland*, the continuing to reſtrain proteſtants

ants by ſuch legal incapacities, is a great error in politics, and cannot but weaken the proteſtant intereſt, and, in conſequence of that, be a real loſs and diſ-ſervice to the government. This paper was written with much ſpirit and ſtrength of argument. But arguments are feeble things when ſet in oppoſition to the views and intereſts of parties. The deſign miſcarried.

Mr. *Abernethy* continued his labours in *Wood-ſtreet* for ten years, with much reputation, and found himſelf very happy in the ſociety of his friends, who held him in the higheſt eſteem. He did not indeed go much into mixed company when the buſineſs of his ſtation did not call him to it; and often ſaid, as converſation was generally conducted, he had little ſatisfaction in it. He therefore ſtaid much at home, and applied himſelf to ſtudy. This was not owing to any thing ſour or unſociable in his temper, for he had a taſte for converſation, and was of a moſt cheerful, as well as affectionate ſpirit; but to a perſuaſion that much of the time ſpent in company was loſt, at leaſt, might be much better employ'd. And that when a habit of paſſing time in a trifling manner was contracted,

contracted, it must have bad effects upon the mind, unbending it too much, and begetting an indolence by which men were rendered averse to application, and in some measure incapable of it. He thought that, of all men, ministers had most reason to guard against this, as it was more particularly their duty to preserve the mind always in an aptitude for the best exercises, and avoid every thing which had a tendency to dissipate the vigor of it. Observing likewise, that where the taste of the company was such, that they could not manage conversation so as to render it worthy of men of sense, and good affections, that dignity of character which they ought always carefully to maintain, must suffer by it.

To this it may be added, that, as in the present age modest merit is not very apt to be much sought after by the *great*, so no man ever less affected to put himself in the way of such than Mr. *Abernethy*, tho' few better qualified for their acquaintance, or more esteemed by those to whom he was known. He accounted it a great error, and which spoke a little mind, to court them with such humble application as some are seen to do. His constant aim was to do

good

good and adorn his own ſtation, and it was no pain to him to be in the greateſt obſcurity which was conſiſtent with this. Had he ever ſuffered himſelf to be conducted by other views, he might have very reaſonably hoped to have appeared in that light, which in the ſenſe of many, is the great thing to be contended for. But as he choſe the ſtation of a diſſenting miniſter, of which he never repented; ſo he was perfectly ſatisfied with thoſe circumſtances which uſually attend it, which indeed place men quite out of ſight, where wealth and ſplendor are the principal objects of attention.

It may perhaps much more amaze the reader, that he ſo long delayed making himſelf known to the learned world; in which it is apparent, from what is already publiſhed, he might have appeared with the greateſt reputation. It was very late in life, before he appeared in it at all; otherwiſe, than by a few occaſional ſermons, and the papers he publiſhed in the controverſies in the north. This ſhews that name and character were not the things for which he laboured And as modeſty generally waits upon true

greatneſs of mind, ſo an inſtance is rarely to be met with, in which both were more conſpicuous, than in this excellent man.

BUT while his friends, from the great ſtrength of his conſtitution, and the vigor of his ſpirit, with the perfect temperance in which he lived, promiſed themſelves they ſhould enjoy him many years; theſe pleaſing proſpects were unexpectedly cut off. He had for a good many years, from time to time, been attacked by the gout; ſuffering much pain in the extremities, but not affected in the vital parts. But, in *December* 1740, that diſorder, all of a ſudden, ſeized his head, and quickly produced the uſual melancholy ſymptoms. As ſoon as he became ſenſible what his caſe was, he needed no monitor, for he immediately concluded the diſorder would prove mortal, and ſeemed to take no notice of any thing ſaid to the contrary by way of encouragement. After the view which has been given of his life and ſpirit, it will be eaſy to conjecture the manner and temper with which he met death. It was with great firmneſs and compoſure of mind, a chearful acquieſcence in the

the will, and a fixed truſt in the power and goodneſs of that Being who governs all. He died in the ſixtieth year of his age.

I HAVE already given an account of ſome papers he publiſhed, as the courſe of theſe ſhort memoirs of his life made it neceſſary. I ſhall now mention the reſt. The firſt he publiſhed, was a ſermon on occaſion of the acceſſion of King *George* the firſt, on *Pſal.* xx. 6. When he was moderator of the general ſynod, he preached a ſermon (according to the uſual rule, before them) on *Dan.* xii. 4. which was publiſhed. He printed likewiſe a ſermon preached on a faſt-day, appointed by the general ſynod, on account of the animoſities then in the north. The text was, 1 *Cor.* iii. 3. After he came to *Dublin*, he preached a ſet of ſermons upon the divine attributes; and in his own life publiſhed an octavo volume of them, all which were upon the exiſtence and *natural* perfections of the Deity. After his death, the ſecond volume was publiſhed by his friends, upon the *moral* attributes. Theſe ſermons were printed in *Dublin*, and reprinted in *London*. I have only to add that

he has left behind him several volumes of miscellany sermons in manuscript, generally very practical. By the specimen presented to the reader in the two volumes now printed, which are the plainest and most practical, he will judge that they are worthy of being communicated to the world; though they cannot appear in it with that advantage they must have done, had he himself reviewed and corrected them. It is from the first draught, they are published.

I SHALL conclude this account of his life with a few particulars which have not been yet taken notice of, or only cursorily mentioned, and which contribute to give a just idea of him.

HE was very remarkable for true and sprightly wit, which was always correct and the most distant possible from levity; this rendered his conversation as agreeable and entertaining, as it was improving and useful; no person of any taste could grow weary of his company. He had naturally a negligent air, and the appearances of inattention. As there was nothing at all affected in these, they

they were not disagreeable to such as knew him; but strangers were often surprized to hear him reason justly, and speak with exactness, when he appeared to them very little to mind what he was engaged in.

Of his eminent piety much has been already said, but it deserves a particular remark, that piety appeared in him in the most amiable manner, and like itself, manly and rational; there was nothing gloomy, nothing stiff or unnatural in his religion. And he was extremely happy in a free, easy and cheerful manner, in conjunction with the greatest tenderness of spirit, and the warmest zeal for God. In his temper and behaviour, men saw that religion, as it was intended to be, so is in reality, the perfection of nature; no other than the proper exercise and improvement of our faculties, and the best means of attaining to the true enjoyment of life.

The whole of his conduct was guarded by the greatest prudence. The most important secrets might with perfect safety be committed to him. And he had the greatest

tenderneſs for the characters of mankind. He never ſpoke to a man's diſadvantage, when it was not neceſſary to anſwer ſome good end; and was utterly abhorrent of ſpeaking evil to gratify a malicious or envious ſpirit, or from poverty of invention and want of what to ſay in company. Indeed, his whole behaviour was ordered with great diſcretion. He was carefully attentive to all the decencies of life. The purity of his manners was unblemiſhed. He was exactly temperate, rather, indeed, to a fault, abſtemious; and ſeemed to take pleaſure in the greateſt ſeverities of virtue.

His paſſions were naturally ſtrong, but they were under ſuch correction, that his temper was uſually ſpoken of as quite immoveable. Incidents, which would have been ſhocking to other men, were met by him without any apparent Emotion. And in ſome circumſtances of life, which were extremely afflicting, he not only carried it with decency, but ſhewed ſuch a tranquillity of ſpirit and conſtancy, as amazed his friends! All who were acquainted with the delicacy of his temper, knew, that this was not in the leaſt owing to inſenſibility; and therefore

fore muſt have high ideas of him, as having by religion and virtuous diſcipline, got above the common weakneſſes of human nature. There was, indeed, no part of his character more to be admired than this.

His mind was formed for friendſhip. He entered into the true ſpirit of it, and had a great reliſh for thoſe ſtrict intimacies in which only the higheſt joys of it can be taſted. But it will be readily concluded from his character, that it muſt be with very few that he could enter into ſuch intimacies. When he did, the generoſity of his ſpirit, the tenderneſs of his affection, and faithful conſtancy, muſt render that relation very happy to his friend. His diary ſhews, that he had ſome ſuch friendſhips, and he frequently mentions them with a ſpirit which became that ſacred relation.

But he was a hearty friend, in the general acceptation of that term, to all men of worth, and ready to do good to all as he had opportunity. He was indeed ſparing in profeſſions, but never failed in important acts of kindneſs. And where he thought reſpect was due, he came ſhort of no one in paying it. But had a juſt ſenſe how un-

worthy it was of him to put on appearances of reſpect to the worthleſs; and a ſhew of honour and regard, where diſregard only and neglect were to be juſtly expected. From this mean vice no man was ever more free. He knew what was due to others, and what he owed to himſelf; and was peculiarly happy in maintaining the dignity of his own character, conſiſtently with modeſty and the greateſt meekneſs of ſpirit.

He took much pleaſure in directing and aſſiſting young candidates in their ſtudies; and was always ready to enter into converſation with them upon any points, with the difficulty of which their minds were preſſed and entangled. But made it his care principally to aſſiſt their reaſonings, and in forming their judgments of things by argument, and according to evidence; endeavouring to encourage liberty of thinking, and to take them off from all undue regard to authority, as he was himſelf the moſt diſtant poſſible from claiming any, or thinking the worſe even of the youngeſt learner for differing from him in diſputable points.

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His faithfulneſs to his friends ſhewed itſelf remarkably in one thing, which is amongſt the very tendereſt offices, and requires the diſcreeteſt hand, that is, animadverting freely upon their culpable weakneſſes. This he never failed of doing when there was the leaſt proſpect of advantage from it. And tho' he could act this part with ſeverity enough when that was neceſſary, yet it was ſo tempered with good-will, and an apparent intention to ſerve the beſt purpoſes, that no one, not quite loſt to ingenuous ſentiments, could be diſpleaſed with him. And he thoroughly underſtood how to addreſs himſelf to men in the moſt effectual manner, and could touch the affections and ſprings of action, with great dexterity, ſuiting his application to the various tempers of men, which no one could more readily find out.

His firſt appearances, as a preacher, promiſed very conſiderable things, but he quickly exceeded all the expectations of his friends. Through the whole time of his miniſtry in the north, he preached without the uſe of his notes in the pulpit; yet was ſeldom

ſeldom or ever at a loſs. A clear, compoſed, and aſſured mind, with a choice and fluency of words which never failed him, and a ſtrong and faithful memory made the delivery of his ſermons eaſy to him; as a great compaſs of invention and readineſs of thought, made the compoſition of them. For ſome years he delivered his ſermons with a very great *pathos*, which tended to ſtrike the imaginations and paſſions of his hearers. But he departed very much from this in his riper age, avoiding every thing which look'd like enthuſiaſm, and addreſſed himſelf more directly to the conſciences of men, and the higher principles of action, in a ſtile ſtrong and nervous, rather than pathetic. After he came to *Dublin*, he conſtantly uſed his notes in the pulpit, not from any neceſſity he was then under, which did not oblige him to it before, but from a perſuaſion it was the beſt way, as upon other accounts, ſo particularly on this, that not uſing notes in the delivery, may prove to ſome a temptation to negligence in the compoſing of their ſermons. How exact his own were, the reader will ſee from the ſermons following.

BUT many thought he did not excel more in any thing than in prayer. In this he had a fluency of thought and expreſſion, which ſeemed inexhauſtible. And the diſcerning hearer might eaſily perceive great fervor of ſpirit, with an exact propriety of words, and very exalted ſtrains of devotion, without any thing of the falſe ſublime, but perfectly ſuitable to the gravity of a ſolemn addreſs to God. It appears from his diary, that he was at much pains to qualify himſelf for performing this part of the public ſervice after a right manner. His prayers upon ſome particular occaſions were compoſed with great care, and committed to memory. And as he look'd upon the ſcriptural ſtyle to be the moſt becoming in our addreſſes to God; ſo he made much uſe of ſcriptural phraſes, and was very happy in the choice of thoſe which were beſt adapted to the matter of his petitions, or adoration and praiſe.

THUS, *I have given the reader the outlines of his character, which he will perceive was very uncommon. I ſhall no longer detain him from the peruſal of the following diſ-*

discourses, which I am persuaded will raise such an opinion of Mr. Abernethy *in the discerning and judicious, as will convince them, that this essay, intended as a piece of just respect to his memory, is far from flattering it; a thing to which indeed there could be no temptation, when it is real perplexity how to give the reader a just notion of his true worth; which the author can honestly declare is the case; and is fully persuaded that such as were intimately acquainted with him, have a far higher Idea of his character, than this representation of it can possibly raise in others.*

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SERMON I.

Of Self-Denial.

Matth. xvi. 24.

Then said Jesus *unto his disciples, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself.*

THESE words certainly contain what is of the greatest importance to all Christians, for it is an essential part of the christian character. Whatever is particularly meant by a man's denying himself, our Saviour expressly declares it, has a strict connexion with being his true disciple; the universality of the demand, and the indispensable necessity of complying with it, could not be more strongly express'd in words, *If any man*, any one of mankind however distinguished, Jew or Gentile, of whatever sort or condition he be, will become a follower of mine, he must deny himself; on no other terms will I acknowledge him for my sincere and approved disciple. Let us therefore apply our minds to the serious consideration of that

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SERM. I. *self-denial* which the religion of Christ enjoins; and to assist you in it, I will endeavour in this discourse, *first*, to explain, and *secondly*, to vindicate it from any just imputation of severity, and shew the reasonableness of it.

First, the word *denying*, in its primary signification, means either an act of the understanding, refusing its assent to a proposition laid before it; or an act of the will refusing its consent to an application, request, or desire which is presented to it. From this last is borrowed the figurative expression of denying ones self. As there are various tendencies in our nature, various appetites, affections, and passions, prompting us to different actions; when the mind deliberating upon them, comes to a determination of choosing some, and rejecting others directly opposite, those, which are so rejected, are said to be denied. And because the motions, however contrary, are all from within; for though the occasion, or the object, may be foreign, yet the propensity or the affection, we know is our own; therefore the thwarting and controuling such motions, is call'd a denial of ourselves. For example, when the lower appetites and inclinations, which the apostle *James* calls *lust*, comprehending them all under one denomination, when

when this, I ſay, comes in competition with conſcience, and the virtuous affections; the one, or the other, muſt be denied; and they are are both comprehended in ourſelves: but it is the former our religion requires us to deny. To ſpeak in the ſtile of the ſacred writer juſt now referred to, when the conceptions of luſt are entertained and carry the determination of the mind, then ſin is brought forth, when conſcience prevails, and the practical deciſion is on its ſide, then an act of chriſtian ſelf-denial is perfected. SERM. I.

This notion of a diverſity of practical principles, or ſprings of action in the human heart, is familiar in the ſcriptures and other moral writings; nor without it can we underſtand the practice of virtue in our preſent ſtate, which is a ſtate of trial and diſcipline. We meet in the ancient moraliſts, frequently, with a diſtinction between the rational and irrational, the merely ſenſitive and the intelligent, the inferior and the ſuperior part of men. There are ſome parts of our conſtitution common to us with the brutal kinds; for the animal nature to anſwer the ends of its being, and it's preſervation, is mov'd by inſtincts to purſue its proper objects; but we are capable of reflection, which the brutes are not; of conſidering the ends of thoſe inſtincts, and thereby judging of

SERM. I. the meaſures and limits within which their direction ſhall be followed; and we are indued with higher faculties and affections, to which the other are ſubordinated; and with liberty to purſue the nobler ends of our rational and moral powers. Hence ariſes the ſtruggle between the motions and tendencies of theſe different principles, which every man may find in his own experience, as the apoſtle expreſſes it, *the ſpirit luſteth againſt the fleſh, and the fleſh luſteth againſt the ſpirit, and theſe two are contrary, the one to the other*; a virtuous diſpoſition conſiſts in the prevalence of the ſpirit or conſcience, and a vicious temper in the predominancy of the lower appetites.

But, I know no author who carries this diſtinction farther, and ſtates it more clearly, than the apoſtle *Paul* in the 7th chapter of his epiſtle to the *Romans*. He gives a very lively deſcription, as in his own perſon, of two oppoſite intereſts or principles in one man: one called *ſin that dwells in him, the body of ſin and death*, comprehending the whole complex of inward temptations, which take their riſe from the body, ſo intimately near, that a man finds them often working in his heart, to entice and draw him away: the other call'd I, more properly the *man*, the rational ſelf-judging agent, that has the abſolute ſupremacy by the order of nature, the right of reſtraining the lower *ſelf*,

ſelf, which the laws of our religion oblige us to deny. Again, St. *Paul* diſtinguiſhes theſe two contrary ſprings of action, by the names of the *law of the mind*, and *the law in the members*, warring againſt it: they both, in ſome ſenſe, operate like laws with ſanctions upon our hopes and fears of pleaſure and pain; but the former only, that of the mind, is the true law of our nature as well as of chriſtianity: and the other, to be brought into ſubjection, or its government to be denied. SERM. I.

It is not neceſſary to enumerate the particulars contain'd in this general head, *the ſelf*, to be denied. Every man knows, for he is conſcious of them, the appetites of his nature to ſenſible objects, and which purſue the pleaſures of the external ſenſes, they are in ſome weaker, in ſome ſtronger, even by their different conſtitutions; but all have them in ſome degree. We find likewiſe averſions to bodily pain and other outward uneaſineſſes of various ſorts, too many to be mention'd; and we find impulſes of anger, a ſtrong inclination, attended with vehement motions in the body, to repel violence offered or harm received from a voluntary invader; which is properly an animal inſtinct, for it is ſeen in beaſts as well as in men, intended originally by the author of nature,

SERM. I. for the safety of the animal; but often carried beyond the bounds which that end prescribes.

But, besides the instincts originally planted in us for the preservation of the animal life, and which terminate there, there are other desires and propensities contracted from our knowledge of the world, and the common course of things in it, which are also a part of the *self* to be denied. When we have begun to tread the path of life, and are capable of observing the conditions of men, we obviously discern a disparity in them; some have much greater measures of power, honour, and wealth than others; and the advantage of superiority in these respects is as easily seen, for it furnishes more abundantly the means of various enjoyment. Hence arises, though without any previous excitations in nature, strong desires, and an eager pursuit of riches and grandeur; which having no connection with the highest ends of our being, are to be retrench'd by the law of the mind; for, when they are indulg'd, they grow up to the pernicious vices of covetousness and ambition; or what the apostle *John* calls *the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life*; eminent branches of the love of the world, which he pronounces utterly inconsistent with the love of the Father, or true religion.

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A multitude there are of other principles of action, or which have the force of principles, affections, paſſions and determinations of one kind or other in the human mind, which may be conſidered in the ſame view, that is, as objects of ſelf-denial, becauſe their tendencies often interfere with a right moral conduct, or with the duty of Chriſtians. Fear ſometimes brings a ſnare; ſorrow is frequently immoderate, both often miſleading men from the path of virtue, and drawing them into the moſt dangerous errors in practice. But I will not inſiſt on theſe things particularly. SERM. I.

It is time we ſhould conſider what is meant by denying them, or whatſoever may be called *ſelf:* and certainly it is not that we ſhould extirpate any natural affection, appetite or paſſion. Our conſtitution is what God has been pleas'd to make it. In vain ſhould we attempt to make any eſſential alteration, and 'tis impious to think, that he requires it; for it would be to reproach his work as if it were faulty, and endeavour to deſtroy it. But indeed our whole nature is wiſely fram'd, and no part of it unneceſſary, ſo far from being evil. Every paſſion, every appetite, every inſtinct in the mind has its particular uſe, as well as each member of the body; as any one may be convinc'd who attentively conſiders that matter.

SERM. I. Nor have we power over the firſt motions of our Inſtincts, any more than over their being. It is their nature to operate in ſuggeſting to the mind, what is agreeable to them, and ſo far we are no more voluntary accountable agents, than in animal actions and motions, which have no dependance at all upon our own choice. Can it enter into any ones mind, that the uneaſy ſenſations of hunger and thirſt, with the ſimple deſire of meat and drink common to all animals, and preventing any thought or deliberation, that theſe are ſins? The perfectly innocent *Jeſus*, altogether free from every kind and degree of moral evil, had them as other men have; tho' ſometimes 'tis certain the deſire, but not without a voluntary indulgence, grows to a criminal exceſs; which is the vice of intemperance. The ſame muſt be ſaid concerning other natural appetites and paſſions, the firſt motions whereof are not faulty, tho' they may be the occaſions of, or temptations to ſin, when they are not duly regulated and reſtrained, which is the province of reaſon and conſcience. But

Secondly, It is exceeding plain, that ſelf-denial imports our abſolute refuſal to comply with any motion or ſuggeſtion in our minds, from whatever quarter it ſprings, ſo far as to do

do what we know to be ſinful. There are ſome caſes, wherein perhaps 'tis difficult to fix the preciſe limits of right and wrong; but there are others, wherein it is not difficult at all, and theſe by far the moſt numerous. Some actions are ſo expreſsly prohibited by the law of God, and have ſuch a glaring turpitude and malignity, as ſtrikes the mind at the firſt view of them; as adultery, murder, theft; the luſt of a man's heart may entice him to all theſe. His laſciviouſneſs may prompt him to the moſt odious acts of impurity; his covetouſneſs may ſolicit him to ſteal; his wrath may puſh him on to the moſt deſtructive outrages againſt his neighbour. But ſelf-denial muſt paſs for nothing at all, if it does not reſtrain ſuch exorbitances; and a man is abandon'd to himſelf in the worſt ſenſe, conſcience having utterly loſt its ſovereignty, unleſs it interpoſes to forbid, nay, and effectually to prevent thoſe finiſhed heinous tranſgreſſions. Let me add, here, that ſin is not only completed in external acts: when the heart deliberately conſents to the temptations, and a reſolution paſſes of complying with it, the guilt of that wickedneſs is really contracted, tho' the outward act ſhould never follow. Thus our Saviour in his ſermon upon the mount, *Matt.* v. expounds the commandments of the moral law, in oppoſition

SERM. I.

SERM. I. position to the short and defective comments of the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, at the 22 *ver.* he pronounces anger resting in the bosom, and breaking out into provoking and insulting words, tho' there be no blood-shed, I say, he pronounces this to be a violation of the sixth commandment, whereby the penalty of disobedience is incurr'd, and at the 28 *ver.* he states a plain case, wherein he expressly declares that adultery is already committed in the heart, without proceeding any further. In other parallel instances, the same judgment is to be made, and therefore we must conclude, that the precept of self-denial reaches to the preventing sinful purposes of heart, as well as the perpetration of outward evil actions. And in this case to deny ourselves, is no more than what St. *Paul* tells us the gospel, or the grace which brings salvation, was intended to teach men; that is, to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts; as well as the acts of impiety and vice, to which they solicit us.

Thirdly, There are no appetites, desires, and passions, planted in the human nature, but what tend to an innocent, if it be a moderate gratification. The fault lies only in the excess; or in transgressing those limits which the obvious reason of things, or the laws of God have

have ſet to the affections, the purſuit and enjoyment. The deſire of eating and drinking may be lawfully gratified, ſo far as the neceſſity of life requires, but in being *drunk with wine there is exceſs*, as the apoſtle ſpeaks; indulging appetite in ſuch a meaſure as to oppreſs nature, and render us unfit for rational, manly, pious, virtuous and charitable exerciſes: this is ſinful, and ought to be denied. Natural affection to parents, to brothers and ſiſters, and to children is innocent, nay virtuous: and to be without it is one of the worſt of characters: but it becomes criminal when it prevails to ſuch a degree, that thro' the influence of our deareſt relatives, or a ſolicitude for their intereſt, we deſert our duty to God. Here the province of ſelf-denial is very plain. It is to reſtrain our appetites, deſires, and paſſions within due bounds, ſo as to preſerve the ſupremacy of conſcience; their juſt ſhare to the higher affections in forming our tempers, and their proper influence in the direction of our conduct. And if the inſtincts of nature are to be ſo far under government, our obligation muſt be as great with reſpect to propenſities we have contracted, which are ſometimes ſtrong even as nature itſelf, taking their riſe from prejudice, cuſtom, and falſe notions, which we have imbibed thro' inattention. And. SERM. I.

Laſtly,

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Laſtly, It ſhould be our conſtant care, that our thoughts do not unduely dwell on the objects of the lower appetites and paſſions; for the tendency of this is to ſtrengthen our affections to them, and increaſe their influence on our practice. We cannot hinder the firſt impreſſions of theſe objects, nor the firſt motions of our affections and deſires to them: but the entertaining them in our thoughts, and meditating upon them is more voluntary. The imagination is often employed actively in colouring them, and ſetting them off with advantage; in forming ſcenes of pleaſure which heighten deſire, and various projects in order to fulfil it. This might be in a great meaſure reſtrained, by a careful attention and purpoſe of heart to exerciſe our thinking powers in a better and more proper manner: but when our vain thoughts lodge within us, and the fancy, not corrected by reaſon, heightens the apparent agreeableneſs of tempting objects, the mind is thereby betrayed into a compliance with the motions of luſts beyond the bounds which God's law has ſet us: and this by frequent indulgence grows into habit, which becomes a ſtrong principle of action, forming the temper, and depriving the ſuperior powers of their juſt dominion.

As

SERM. I.

As this is the natural progreſs of ſin, whereby it advances to its reign in our mortal bodies, bringing the ſoul into the moſt abject ſlavery; in oppoſition to it, ſelf-denial become habitual would recover us to true freedom, reſtoring the ſovereignty of reaſon and conſcience. And the acquiring of ſuch a habit I would principally recommend as the very perfection of our obedience to our Saviour's command in the text. It is acquired as all other habits are, by cuſtomary practice or frequently repeated acts. Let us then arm ourſelves with ſtrong reſolution, and in purſuance of it, accuſtom ourſelves to watch over the firſt tendencies of appetite and paſſion; to examine carefully the report of the imagination concerning them; to ſuſpend our conſent to their motions, till we have maturely weighed and compared them with the juſt rules of action, and ſeen them agreeable; peremptorily to reject their demands when conſcience gainſays, or is doubtful; and reſolutely to oppoſe their dominion. When this kind of diſcipline is habitual to us, the difficulties of ſelf-denial are conquered, and the practice of our duty is eaſy.

Indeed, when men have long gone on in an evil courſe, and have been uſed to indulge every appetite without controul, their firſt

eſſays

SERM. I. eſſays in the way of ſelf-denying virtue will be painful to them. The * Prophet *Jeremiah* compares the impotence of mind to act worthily, which is contracted by vicious habits, to natural impoſſibilities. *As the Ethiopian cannot change his ſkin, nor the leopard his ſpots, ſo they who have been accuſtomed to do evil, cannot learn to do well:* which, at leaſt, imports a very great difficulty. But even this difficulty is not altogether unconquerable. Strong virtuous reſolutions, by the aſſiſtance of divine grace, have got the better of very bad habits. The conqueſt however cannot be obtained without a ſtruggle; and they who will break off their ſins by repentance, and return to the paths of righteouſneſs, muſt lay their account to meet with pain and uneaſineſs, eſpecially at the beginning. To this imperfect ſtate of mens minds are accommodated the Scripture repreſentations of this duty, which deſcribe it under the notions of *mortifying the deeds of the body and crucifying the fleſh with its affections and luſts* †. Our Saviour uſes the figurative expreſſions of ‡ *plucking out the right eye and cutting off the right hand*, which mean the ſame thing with denying ourſelves, only ſignifying, that violence muſt be done to vicious and worldly inclina-

* Jer. xiii. 23. † Gal. v. 24. ‡ Matt. v. 29.

tions

tions confirmed by habit, and the reluctance arising from their prevalence in the heart must be overcome, be it ever so painful. This is the disadvantage which attends our infancy in a virtuous state; and therefore the scripture account of self-denial under the idea of mortification was well adapted to the new disciples of Christ in the first age, as it is to others in every age, whose condition is parallel in respect of weakness. SERM. I.

But Christians should always be growing up to perfection in every virtue: and in order to that increasing in self-denial, which it may be expected will go on the more successfully, because it still becomes more easy. And indeed it may be very useful for Christians of the highest attainments who are zealously pressing on to perfection, by a customary severity towards their inferior appetites, to lay restraints upon their liberty, within the limits of what is strictly lawful, that they may the more effectually restore and preserve a dominion over themselves, that thereby they may be the more stedfast, abounding in the work of the Lord. This kind of discipline St. *Paul* used, as he tells 1 *Cor.* ix. 27. *I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection*; that is, as appears from the preceding verses, by denying myself liberty in the use of indifferent things, in order to my being

SERM. I. being leſs incumber'd, and proceeding with greater expedition in the chriſtian race; and that I may the better ſecure to myſelf the prize of the high calling of God in Chriſt Jeſus.

Secondly, I come now to vindicate this precept of ſelf-denial, from any juſt imputation of ſeverity; and ſhew the reaſonableneſs of it. This precept of chriſtianity has been objected againſt by men who attend more to the ſound than the meaning of words, and are ready to lay hold on the firſt ſlender appearances of an argument againſt religion, without examining them thoroughly. They alledge, 'tis unnatural to require that men ſhould deny themſelves; that is, ſubdue, renounce, and mortify the deſires and paſſions which God has planted in their hearts, to no purpoſe, unleſs to make them uneaſy; if they are not to be gratified. Such reaſoning will have very little weight with ſerious attentive minds; for the weakneſs of it preſently appears when we look into the conſtitution of our nature itſelf. Who does not feel interfering tendencies in his own heart; deſires at once to different objects, deſires, which cannot be gratified at once, but one neceſſarily muſt yield to another? What then ſhall we take upon us to cenſure the work of God our maker, as an inconſiſtent ſelf-contradictory ſyſtem

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ſyſtem? ſhall we ſay to him that formed us, why haſt thou made me thus, with inclinations not to be ſatisfied; particularly, with deſires of ſenſual and worldly enjoyment; with deſires of revenge, or rather of ſelf-defence, perverted by our own fault into revenge; and at the ſame time with affections of a quite different tendency, and with conſcience, which remonſtrates againſt the gratifying of our lower deſires in many inſtances, and torments us if we do not reſtrain them? what then? where is the inconſiſtency in all this? I hope the variety which appears in our conſtitution, is no argument againſt the wiſdom and goodneſs of the author, ſince there is proviſion made for order and harmony, and for a high, a rational happineſs to be obtain'd by us, if we will preſerve that ſubordination in the exerciſe of our powers and affections, which the frame of nature itſelf clearly points to. But I need not carry the argument ſo far, my preſent ſubject does not require a defence of the foundations of natural religion and morality, it is enough to reſt the defence of chriſtianity, that part of it I am now conſidering upon them. Let us then take the conſtitution of human nature, as in fact we find it to be; and, I think, every conſiderate perſon will be convinced, that according to it, we cannot be happy, but in the practice of virtue,

SERM. I. and that we cannot practiſe virtue without ſelf-denial. Now ſhall we find fault with the author of our religion for requiring us to do what our own reaſon requires, and without which we cannot have peace in our own minds, nor any hopes of a future felicity?

Again, if we conſider the life of man, as it now is within the limits of the preſent ſtate, abſtracting from the conſideration of religious virtue, and of a future condition of being, we ſhall find that ſelf-denial is neceſſary to our obtaining the ends of it; and that this is a precept of prudence as well as chriſtianity. Man in his preſent ſtate, which to every one who conſiders it attentively will appear to be a ſtate of probation and diſcipline, may be conſidered in two different capacities, the natural and the religious; between which there is a remarkable analogy: both are under the government of divine providence; both terminate in ſuch happineſs as we are capable of, but of different kinds, the one aims at, and has its complete end in our higheſt felicity, which conſiſts in the perfection of virtue and righteouſneſs; the other, the natural capacity, perſues the greateſt eaſe, proſperity, or enjoyment, which in the whole can be attained here: the attaining of theſe different ends in a great meaſure, depends upon ourſelves. As

virtue

virtue is improveable, and by degrees grows up to perfection by our own diligence; ſo every one ſees in the fruition of life, our intereſt is carried on, and our temporal happineſs advanced by the proper exerciſe of our own powers, and the prudent diligent uſe of ſuch means as providence puts into our hands. Both are obſtructed by the ſame means, and both promoted by the ſame means. The great impediments to our intereſts in this world, I mean the regular and ſucceſsful proſecution of them, are appetites and paſſions, eſpecially when confirmed by habits. Who is the man that enjoys life, eaſily attains to a comfortable worldly eſtate, and to a high reputation? not ſurely the glutton, the drunkard, the ſluggard, the proud, the revengeful and the cruel, or that any other way gives an unbounded liberty to his luſts and his paſſions; but, on the contrary, he that is maſter of himſelf, that can thwart his humours, bridle his inclinations and deny his eaſe, or other ſenſual gratifications; and the ſame are the means of advancing to moral perfection. We ſee then that God, as the maſter of our lives and worldy eſtates, the guardian of our preſent condition of being, has taught us to deny ourſelves; and that by the ſame kind of diſcipline which is neceſſary to our being wiſe in our preſent generation, we

SERM. I.

SERM. I. are inured to, and prepared for the beſt and moſt important wiſdom, even that which is unto ſalvation.

Let us conſider how great, how noble the ends of virtue, of moral perfection and the future happineſs, are above thoſe of the preſent life; and if wiſdom requires our denying our appetites and paſſions for the latter, ſhall we complain of it as a hardſhip to ſubmit to the ſame ſelf-denial for the other? Is he juſtly counted a fool with reſpect to his concerns in this world, who will not curb his appetite of thirſt to prevent or cure a dropſy; who will ſacrifice a reaſonable proſpect of lawful gain to ſloth and lazineſs; or who to gratify a little peeviſh reſentment will throw himſelf out of the way of riſing to an honourable ſtation in his country? and what ſhall we think of the man, who will wilfully indulge himſelf in theſe or ſuch like paſſions, at the expence of his integrity, the inward peace of his mind, and his hopes of heaven?

Thus you ſee, that this precept, ſo far from being an unreaſonable impoſition on the liberties of mankind, is excellently accommodated to the conſtitution and the ſtate of human nature, nay, and abſolutely neceſſary to the attaining its true ends. But our Saviour has made it a part of his religion, and he has enforc'd

forc'd it with peculiar motives. It will always have great weight with every ſincere diſciple of Chriſt, that this is, by his own expreſs declaration, an eſſential part of that character, and an indiſpenſible condition, without which we cannot expect his approbation: *If any man will come after me let him deny himſelf.* Whatever you do in compliance with the chriſtian inſtitution, muſt paſs for nothing, if this one duty be neglected. Tho' you believe the goſpel, and profeſs it zealouſly, contend for the faith, and be ever ſo aſſiduous in attending all the poſitive appointments of religion; what will all avail unleſs you learn to deny yourſelves?

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Farther we may obſerve, that as divine wiſdom ſhines in all our Saviour's inſtructions, ſo particularly his enforcement of this duty is adapted in the beſt manner to our ſtate of infirmity and temptation. When men are vehemently urg'd to indulge their appetites and paſſions, as in the caſe of bad habits, or of ſome peculiarly ſtrong worldly attachments, as when the intereſt of a tenderly beloved friend comes in competition with our duty; ſo that the ſoliciting affection is dear as a right hand or an eye, in that caſe the mind under a violent hurry and perturbation, cannot calmly attend to more ingenuous conſiderations, and therefore a ſtronger remedy is applied; the terrors of the

SERM. I. Lord are ſet againſt the allurements of the fleſh, and we are diſſuaded from gratifying ourſelves by the fear of future puniſhment. Thus our Saviour, ſuppoſing an inward cauſe of offence to tempt us very violently, and that ſo ſtrong is our affection, we are as unwilling to renounce it as to ſuffer the amputation of a bodily member, even that itſelf would be ſubmitted to for ſaving life, and here a greater neceſſity is laid upon us; for we have no other choice than either to bear the uneaſineſs of denying the preſent gratifications, or ſuffer the dreadful penalty of God's eternal diſpleaſure, * *It is better for thee to enter into life maimed, or halt, or having one eye, than having two hands, and two feet and two eyes, to be caſt into hell fire, where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched.* And,

Laſtly, The example of our great Maſter himſelf is propos'd to us. It is ſaid of him, *Rom.* xv. 3. *that he pleas'd not himſelf.* He had no irregular appetites to gratify; but the ſame ſenſibility to the eaſe and innocent pleaſures of life as other men: but he denied them, ſubmitting to hunger and thirſt, and wearineſs in attending the work his Father ſent him into the world for, that is glorifying him

* Mark ix. 43—48

and

and doing good. He was denied to the honour and eſteem among men, which he had the beſt title to, enduring the contradiction of ſinners and bearing grievous reproach; and even to life itſelf which he ſacrificed to the cauſe of truth and holineſs, and for the redemption of mankind. If then *we abide in him*, let us walk as he did, and follow his Example. SERM. I.

SERMON II.

The Goſpel a Law of *Liberty*.

James ii. 12.

So ſpeak ye and ſo do, as they that ſhall be judged by the law of liberty.

SERM. II.

ALL men who have a juſt ſenſe of the dignity and privileges of the human nature, conſider liberty as an ineſtimable endowment which God has vouchſafed unto us, to be by all means preſerv'd inviolable, to be zealouſly aſſerted and earneſtly contended for. The greateſt part of the creatures which we ſee have no ſhare in it; the whole ſyſtem of inanimate things is neceſſarily ſubject to the direction of almighty power, and is moved by the ſovereign will of the Creator. The lower Species of animals have a kind of Freedom, but in a very narrow ſphere, being active and determining themſelves only according to their Inſtincts for the purpoſes of a very limited and ſhort-liv'd exiſtence. But, the author of nature having diſtinguiſhed man with much higher

higher capacities and made him for nobler ends, has given him ſuitable liberty, a power of purſuing thoſe ends by the light of his larger underſtanding, of comparing a great variety of motives to action, and making a choice upon the compariſon. Every one feels himſelf poſſeſs'd of this privilege and rejoices in it; without it we cannot well conceive how we ſhould have any taſte for happineſs; this, at leaſt, is certain, that the higheſt, and the greateſt variety of our enjoyments ſpring from our acting voluntarily. But it is in its own nature capable of being abuſed; a liberty of doing right, is, in us at leaſt, accompanied with a liberty of doing wrong; and if we may freely purſue our own happineſs, we may alſo freely make ourſelves unhappy, which indeed is the caſe of very many; not that they have any ſuch expreſs intention, for it's impoſſible any intelligent being ſhould not deſire its own good, but thro' miſtake, and inadvertency, and corrupt prejudices, they are led into wrong meaſures. Nay, very often ſo it is, that thro' a ſupine indolence, neglecting to uſe and to improve thoſe powers which ought to direct the exerciſe of their liberty, and giving up themſelves habitually to be conducted by the lower ſpring of action in human nature, by appetites and paſſions, men loſe in a great meaſure, SERM II.

SERM. II. measure, the privilege itself, and are in a kind of servitude; so the scripture represents it and very justly. A liberty to act against reason, and against the principal end of our being, is not worthy of the name, but is a real bondage.

This having been the wretched condition of mankind generally, so far that they were *dead in trespasses and sins*, overcome of their corruptions, and by them *brought into bondage*, it was the glorious design of christianity to recover them to true freedom; so our Saviour himself expressly declares in the 8th of St. *John*'s gospel, 31st and 32d verses: *Then said Jesus to the Jews which believed on him, if ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.* This is the high privilege which by my religion ye shall obtain; if ye firmly believe the truths I have taught you, if you adhere to them constantly, and improve them faithfully, you shall be free. And when they misunderstood his words, apprehending that he referred to an outward servitude to men which they never had been under, he explains himself at the 34th ver. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, whosoever commiteth sin is the servant of sin*; to be freed from that slavery is the truest freedom, which he intended to restore to men; and he adds 36th ver. *If the*

Son

Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. Thus we are to understand the prophetic declaration of *Isaiah*, chap. lxi. which our Lord applies to himself, *Luke* iv. 18. *The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.* Agreeably to which the apostle in my text gives the gospel the excellent character of the law of liberty, as he also doth in the 1st chap. of this epistle, and 25th ver. with the addition of this epithet, *the perfect law of liberty*; and as this is a very amiable representation and most worthy our serious attention, I will endeavour in the following discourse, *first*, to explain it: 2*dly*, I will consider the apostles direction to christians, that they should constantly endeavour to form their whole conduct, by a respect to the future judgment, which will be dispensed according to the gospel, the law of liberty. *So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.*

First, To explain this character of the christian religion, that it is a *law of liberty*. It is evident that it is a law, that is, a revelation of the will of God to men for the direction

SERM. II. direction of their lives, enforced by the sanction of rewards and punishments. Yet our condition is not rendered servile by it; for we ought not to imagine that every kind of restraint, and whatever is intended to give a direction to the exercise of these powers, which are the subject of liberty, that I say, every thing of this kind is inconsistent with freedom. We can't in any case act without motives, but they do not make us slaves. The brutes are determined by the appearance of sensible good, in which proportionably to the degrees and kind of their perception, they have liberty. The human nature being rational, reason does not destroy its freedom, but establish it, and is the rule of it; then only are we indeed free when we conduct ourselves with understanding. Nay, the liberty of the Supreme Being, the most perfect of all, is always exercised with the exactest wisdom and rectitude. Perhaps some imagine that it is a high privilege to act without regard to any motive, and that the will should determine itself with a kind of supremacy independant of reason; but it cannot be, the very frame of our nature does not allow it, that our minds should not be influenced by motives; and whether is he more free who is governed by those of sense merely, or of reason? It is true they are in this respect alike free, that they equally act without

out

out constraint; but surely it cannot be difficult to determine whether the liberty of a man or a beast be the most valuable, and whether the real excellence of that privilege does not always depend on, and is proportioned to the wisdom with which it is exercised. A man in a fever, or a disturbance of mind from any other outward cause, acts with all the appearance of freedom, and yet no one will say that he is really free; which must rest on this principle as its foundation, that the exercise of true human liberty depends on the exercise of reason, and still the less reason, the less liberty. SERM. II.

Again, as the creator of all things is infinitely good, he must have bestowed this high prerogative on man, not to make him miserable, but to make him happy. But, if we consider the intire hnman constitution, it will appear that the use of liberty without reason or against it, tends to misery. We cannot be happy otherwise than in the harmony of our powers and affections; and if there must be harmony there must be government, a subordination of some to others, because our affections have very different, nay, very opposite tendencies. The man who gives himself wholly up to the direction of his senses and appetites, will find that the superior faculties make

SERM. II. make contrary demands; and if those demands be not complied with, they give him very great uneasiness, the greatest often that the mind is capable of, so that he cannot enjoy his lower pleasures without controul. It is true, that by a customary indulgence to vicious inclinations, that uneasiness abates; but the peace and the liberty then enjoyed is unnatural, and rather a real stupidity. Besides, that it is of no certain continuance; when outward gratifications fail, when afflictive events press the mind, or any other inevitable occasions of self-reflection, it comes then with a greater force and more exasperated severity, because conscience has been so long laid asleep, and the tormenting presages of future misery as the penal consequences of sin, are a most painful ingredient in it. On the other hand, when reason and Conscience have their full force in the mind, when the inferior springs of action are subject to them, and controuled by their law, there is an inward security and peace, solid and lasting, and all the uneasiness which arises from the rebellion of the appetites and passions, is over-ballanc'd by the very pleasure of thwarting and denying them. Upon the whole, then, it appears, that the only true liberty suitable to the human nature, worthy to be desired by us, and which tends to our real

real perfection and happiness, is that which is exercised according to the direction of reason and wisdom. SERM. II.

On this account principally the gospel is called the law of liberty, it restores the empire of reason in men, and rescues them from servitude to their lusts and passions. It has this denomination on an other account, which I may afterwards insist on, namely, as it has abolished the ceremonial-law, a yoke, which St. *Peter* says, *neither we nor our fathers were able to bear* *. This liberty by the gospel is largely explained by the apostle *Paul*. But St. *James*, not treating of that subject particularly, it is reasonable to understand the character as applied by him in a greater latitude. In the 1st chap. he has recommended a diligent attention to, and a due improvement of the word of God, that we should receive it *with meekness as the ingrafted word which is able to save us, laying apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness*; and, then, he describes the different sorts of hearers, the careless, unattentive, unreformed; and the serious and obedient. The former he compares to a man *beholding his natural face in a glass*, who *soon forgets what manner of man he was*. The other, looking stedfastly, and with the most earnest attention into the gospel, is transform'd

* Acts xv. 10.

by

SERM. II. by the renewing of his mind, and becomes a faithful and constant doer of the will of God. 'Tis in this description he inserts the character of *the law of liberty*, which, therefore, I conclude has a reference to the rescuing of men from the power of their vices and corrupt affections, that they may practise pure religion as the proper effect of christianity.

The connexion of the text stands thus. The apostle had censur'd the *Jews*, to whom he writes, for their partiality in making distinctions among men according to their outward condition, exhorting them to fulfil the royal law, *thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*, which abstracts from all such considerations. To this law we must have an universal respect, not obeying it in one instance only, but in all, otherwise we shall not be accepted; then follows, *so speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty*, which application plainly points to universal obedience as the proper intent of the gospel, in opposition to the contrary tendency of our own lusts and passions.

Indeed St. *Paul* himself explains the freedom we have obtained by the law of *Christ* in this manner; as in the viiith to the *Rom.* 2d ver. *For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin*

sin and death. What these opposite laws are, appears from the preceeding chapter, where they are called the *law of the members*, and *the law of the mind*; the one leading to sin, and holding the soul in captivity to it, which is a most wretched and cruel slavery; the other directing to that which is good and well-pleasing in God's sight. Now, since immediately to this is subjoined that account of the christian law, or the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, that it makes us free from the law of sin and death, what can the meaning be, but that it restores the sovereingty of the mind, delivering it from the reign of sin in the mortal body, that henceforth christians should yield themselves unto God, and their members the instruments of righteousness, which is the truest liberty, the liberty of men, of intelligent and moral agents? SERM. II.

Secondly, Pursuant to this, christians by the gospel have obtained a deliverance from condemnation, and therefore it may justly be called the law of liberty. Death is the punishment of sin, established unalterably by the law of God; mankind therefore, conscious of guilt, have a dread of it which fills their minds with horror, and holds them in an uncomfortable bondage. According to the clearness of the apprehensions which

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they have concerning the divine law, and the threatnings contained in it, so is their terror; and the Jewish law being the most express in this point, without declaring the remission of sin, it is, therefore, called the *ministration of death* and of *condemnation*; and they who were under it, *received the spirit of bondage to fear*, as the apostle says, *Rom.* viii. 15. But, Christ Jesus having *tasted death for every man*, and being, in order to reconcile us to God, as mediator, made *partaker of flesh and blood, that by death he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is the devil*, he has by his law of grace proclaimed forgiveness, and an immunity from the punishment of sin to such as sincerely repent, thus express'd, *Heb.* ii. 15. *to deliver them who through fear of death were all their life time subject to bondage.* Upon which they who are so delivered receive the spirit of adoption, whereby they serve God and obey his commandments with freedom and chearfulness.

Thirdly, The gospel is a law of liberty, as it frees christians from the burthensome rites of the Mosaic institution. When God was pleased to separate the Israelites for a peculiar people unto himself, and form them into

into a nation and a church, he saw fit, for what reasons I do not now inquire, to appoint a multitude of ceremonies which were to continue in force during that dispensation. This must be very grievous to a rational worshipper, whose great satisfaction it is to see the reasonableness of the actions he performs, and their conduciveness to the true ends of worship. The apostles therefore speak meanly of those ordinances, comparing them with the liberty, the spirit and truth of christianity; they call them carnal, beggarly elements, the rudiments of this world, and only shadows of good things to come. Besides, the terror which accompanied that ministration because of the severity of its threatnings, the weakness and unprofitableness of the service itself made the very attendance on it a great grievance. But, now, the Lord is *that spirit* of which christianity is the ministration; not like the *killing* letter of the Old Testament, which denounced wrath for every offence, but a ministry of righteousness or justification, which exceeds in glory, especially, because thereby the excellent things of religious virtue, the divine precepts of eternal righteousness, are *engraven on the fleshly tables of the heart*, forming in it noble dispositions, most be-

SERM. II.

SERM. II.

coming the dignity of the human nature. And where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty, an enlargement of heart, and confidence becoming the sons of God. The different conditions of the servants of God by the law and the gospel, is represented, *Gal.* iv. by the difference between the state of a child who is an heir under age, and that of one who has obtained the plenary possession and free enjoyment of his inheritance. *Now, I say, that the heir as long as he is a child differeth nothing from a servant or bondman, tho' he be Lord of all; but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father; even so, we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons; and because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the spirit of his son into your hearts, crying,* Abba, *Father.*

And, *lastly*, the gospel is a law of liberty, as it sets us free from the power and authority of men in matters of religion and conscience. The Jews were in a servile state, not

not only by a multiplicity of external rites which were of undoubted obligation, because God had appointed them; but their teachers superadded to this yoke many ceremonies merely of their own invention, and imposed them on the people. This they carried so far that our Saviour himself inveighed against them with great severity, declaring that they transgressed the commandment of God, and made it of no effect by their traditions; and to this purpose he applies the words of the prophet *Isaiah*, *Matt.* xv. 8. *This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; but in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.* The blessed author of christianity has taken care to guard against such an invasion of his prerogative and the rights of his disciples, by establishing it as a perpetual law, that no one who is called by his name, and is his professed follower, shall at any time claim a legislative authority in his church, *Matt.* xxiii. 8. *Be not ye called* Rabbi, *for one is your master even Christ, and all ye are brethren; and call no man your father upon the earth, for one is your father which is in heaven. Neither be ye called master, for one*

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is your maſter, even Chriſt. Do not aſpire to ſuch a domination over one another as the Jewiſh maſters and heads of ſchools do, who arrogate a precedency and juriſdiction even in religious things; but it ſhall not be ſo with you my diſciples; the firm bond of your union, and foundation of your mutual good offices to each other, is your ſtrict adherence to God your father, and your head and Saviour Chriſt Jeſus. It would indeed be an intolerable bondage to have conſcience in ſubjection to frail and fallible men, but it is the high privilege of Chriſt's ſervants, that they acknowledge no other lord but himſelf, and have an unalienable right to ſearch the records of his will, every one for himſelf, as being only accountable to him. I come in the

Second place, to conſider the apoſtle's direction to chriſtians, that they ſhould conſtantly endeavour to form their whole conduct by a reſpect to the future judgment, which will be diſpenſed according to the goſpel, to the law of liberty, *ſo ſpeak ye, and ſo do, as they who ſhall be judged by the law of liberty.* It ought never to be imagined that the liberty, wherewith Chriſt hath made us free, was intended to weaken the obligations of our duty, or take away the binding

binding force of the divine precepts which are indispensable. He came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it; and so far from diminishing the strength of that motive which is taken from the future judgment, on the contrary, it is established by the gospel, which declares, *that God now commandeth all men every where to repent, because he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness.* This, therefore, at least, is a necessary caution insinuated in the text against the abuse of christian liberty, as if it imported an immunity from the righteous judgment of God: instead of that, the gospel has explained the nature of this judgment more fully, and asserted it more clearly, declared the impartial equity and the universality of it, with all the circumstances which can concur to render it awful to men, and induce them by the expectation of it to the practice of religion and virtue. The light of nature itself, and that work of his law which God has written in our hearts, directs us to look for a distribution of rewards and punishments hereafter, since the administration of providence, here, does not shew such a difference between the conditions of good and bad men, as we cannot reasonably doubt but the wise and righteous

SERM. II. ruler of the world will finally make; and our accusing and excusing thoughts are the presages of that sentence which the great lawgiver will pass upon us according to our works. But the gospel has ascertained this matter more particularly and expressly to all who believe its divine authority, as is evident from numberless passages in the Evangelists. And we see that St. *Paul*, *Rom.* ii. 14—17, having mentioned the rational arguments taken from those natural notices God has given of their duty to all men, adds in the 15th ver. this positive express declaration, explaining the manner of the judgment. *In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men, by* Jesus Christ, *according to my gospel.* Not meaning that the gospel shall be the rule of proceeding with all men in the great day of their final accounts, which it cannot be, particularly with respect to the *Gentiles*, who never heard of christianity, and of whom he is there particularly speaking; but that the gospel has fix'd it as an important article of our belief, that God will judge every one of mankind by *Jesus Christ* according to the law they were under.

And, this certainly is a very strong argument for the practice of our duty in every particular

particular branch of it, to which purpose the apostle here improves it. It is the strongest reason why men should be careful to obey all the commandments of God, and so order all their words and actions as they may hope that they shall be approv'd by him, since *all our works shall be brought into judgment, and every secret thing, whether it be good or bad* *; and since, as our Saviour has taught us, *by our words we shall be justified, and by our words we shall be condemned* †. This is a consideration which must strike the mind of every one who seriously attends to it, persuading him to govern his tongue, and to govern his life religiously; to watch over his whole behaviour with the utmost circumspection, that so he may not be ashamed before the great Judge at his appearing, but may have confidence towards him. But, SERM. II.

Secondly, It would seem by the connexion of the apostle's discourse, that he design'd this particularly as a motive to candor and charity in all our deportment towards men. He blames the Christian *Jews* for carrying it so partially as they did towards their Fellows. The rich who came into their assemblies, were treated with great civility, but the

* Eccles. xii. † Matt. xii. 37.

SERM. II. the poor were despised. This was a very faulty respect of persons, unbecoming religious simplicity, and contrary to that royal law, as he calls it, *ver.* 8. *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* Certainly no one can imagine, that the outward distinctions of condition in this world should direct the measures of our regard to our neighbours: according to that law in which our whole duty to them is comprehended, since the poor, as well as the rich, partake of the same human nature, and the same gospel grace, are united, by the same bonds, in fine, are in every respect equally our neighbours, how are we justified in making a difference? Charity is an undistinguishing principle of good offices to all men, and brotherly kindness the principle of the same good offices to all our fellow servants, and children of God our father, and fellow members of the body of Christ. Indeed, according to the religion of the *Jews*, it was otherwise, especially according to the sentiments which prevail'd among them in the last age of that dispensation. The ceremonial law made an inclosure which appropriated many of their kind offices, and their intimate fellowship, to those of their own nation. But, especially, their teachers carried this much farther

ther than ever the divine institution intended, SERM. for they pronounced men of other nations, II. and religious professions, hated and accursed of God; therefore, worthy not of their friendly regard, but of their aversion and contempt. But christianity has taken away all such distinctions, and those restraints of charity, which must be disagreeable to a kind and generous temper; it gives full scope to the principle of benevolence, which may now exert itself with an unconfin'd freedom, not narrow'd by kindreds, particular denominations, and outward badges of distinction. Christ died as a propitiation, not for the Jews only, but the whole world, and *gathered together into one, the children of God who were scattered abroad.* The gospel being, therefore, in this respect, a law of liberty, the spirit becoming it is a large and generous one, an extensive charity, not limited by these outward and partial considerations whereby men straiten the best dispositions of their own nature. According to the law by which we expect to be judged, so should our tempers and our actions be. If then, the royal law of charity which requires good-will and the proper expressions of it to all men, and a hearty love, with a peaceable affectionate behaviour towards all men,

SERM. II. men, who in every place call on the name of the Lord Jesus, of whatever tongue, kindred, or nation they be, or whatever outward condition in this world; if this be the rule of judgment, what hope can profess'd christians have, what confidence towards their supreme, righteous judge, in a partial and unmerciful disposition? Will the law of liberty acquit us in confining our charity, in appropriating our respect to the rich, while we despise the poor, or in making any such distinction, indeed, any distinction which does not affect the true foundations of mutual love. Nay, the apostle adds, in the words immediately following the text, and as a sequel of it, *for he shall have judgment without mercy, who hath shewed no mercy, and mercy rejoiceth against judgment*; that is, the man whose conscience approves him as impartially charitable and merciful in his disposition, and his whole conversation, shall assure his heart before God, having confidence in the expectation of the future judgment and good hope that he shall not be condemned.

Thirdly, There is in the exhortation of the text a designed reference to the universality of our obedience, as that only which can give us hope of being acquitted in judgment.

ment. In the verses immediately preceeding, the apostle states the case of a partial obedience to God's law, and shews the insufficiency of it to our acceptance. *For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, is guilty of all. For he that said do not commit adultery, said also do not kill.* Now, *if thou committest no adultery, yet if thou killest thou art become a transgressor of the law.* The reason and the justness of this decision is very plain, since it is the same supreme authority which has enjoin'd all the commandments of the law, and forbidden all the transgressions of it, that authority is affronted, and its right violated, by disobeying any of the commandments, and by committing one transgression as well as another; for example, by murder as well as adultery; for 'tis evident, that if a respect to the will of God governs the mind of a man in any case, it ought to govern him in all cases where the will of God is equally known; and even where the substance of an action seems to be conformable to a divine precept, yet the principle cannot be available to a man's acceptance with God, unless there be a conformity in the whole tenor of his life to all the divine precepts. The same temptation, or an equally strong one,

SERM. II. one, if applied, would prevail with the sinner to break the whole law, or any of its commandments, which actually prevails with him in the one point wherein he does offend. Now what is the consequence from all this? *So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.* Let the influence of your professed expectation of a future judgment by the gospel, appear in the whole of your Conduct, in all your works and words, Do not imagine, that you satisfy the obligations of your christian character, or that you can maintain the well-grounded hope of divine acceptance at last by some good actions, and abstaining from some sins, unless you abound in every good work, and abstain from all kind and all appearance of evil.

One reflection upon what has been said, is very obvious, and that is all I shall farther insist upon at this time, namely, libertinism in practise, or licentiousness of life, is so far from being included in, that it is directly contrary to christian liberty. For the apostle, when he is most strictly pressing the observance of all God's commandments, and enforcing it by the most powerful of all considerations, the future judgment, he gives the gospel the character

racter of the law of liberty; which if it were to be understood in this sense, that it gives a licence to sin, would be perfectly inconsistent. Nay, in the words immediately following the text, and thro' the whole remaining part of the chapter, he designedly and largely proves, that we cannot be justified before God, otherwise than by works of righteousness, or an universal and persevering obedience. There were some then, as there have been at other times, who professing the gospel, expected to be justified by the faith of it without works, and tho' they indulg'd themselves in wicked courses, which was turning the grace of God into a criminal liberty, and into *lasciviousness*, as the Apostle *Jude* speaks, and making Christ the *minister of sin:* but, St. *James* shews the vanity of such a pretence, and confirms his doctrine of Justification, or final absolution in the day of judgment, by works; he confirms it, I say, by examples from the Old Testament, such as *Rahab*, and the patriarch *Abraham*, which might be very convincing to the Jews who had gone into this pernicious Error. SERM. II.

Let us then, take care to understand our liberty aright, and that we do not abuse it to purposes inconsistent with its true nature and design;

SERM. II. design; which we may be sure is always done, when men take any encouragement from it to sin; to allow themselves in any works contrary to righteousness, to the fear of God, to purity and charity. This is a point in which the apostles have taken great care to instruct christians. St. *Paul*, indeed, in his epistle to the *Galatians*, shews a very warm zeal for liberty; he could not bear that any encroachment should be made upon it; for when false brethren were brought in privily, to spie out the liberty of christians in order to ensnare, *and bring them into bondage, he would not give place by subjection so much as for an hour* *. Nay, when the apostle *Peter* thro' fear of the *Jews*, had gone into a separation upon the score of the ceremonies, requiring the observance of them as a condition of religious communion, and so compelling the Gentiles to conform to the customs of the Jews; *Paul* withstood him to the face, and he recommended it to christians, Chap. v. 1. *To stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free*; but in the 13th Verse, he gives this necessary caution, *ye have been called into liberty, only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh:* do

* Gal. ii. 5.

not

not take a licence to yourselves in any vicious practices, nor indulge corrupt affections; and let there be no animosities, no strife, nor envying among you, which will indeed shew you to *be carnal and walk as men*; but *by love serve one another*. To the same purpose he warns the *Corinthians* that they should not in the use of their liberty offend against charity, 1st epistle viii. 9. *But take heed least by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak.* St. *Peter*, also, earnestly exhorts the converted *Jews*, not to imitate the rest of their country men who committed great disorders under the pretence of freedom, 1st epistle ii. 16, *as free and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness*, by an obstinate resistance and contempt of lawful human authority, *but as the servants of God.* SERM. II.

Thus let us always value our liberty as a high priviledge; maintain, but not abuse it; and live in expectation of the future judgment; being *holy in all manner of conversation* *. Expecting *the resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust*, let us, after the example of the holy apostle, *herein exercise ourselves to have always consciences void of offence towards God and towards men.*

* Acts xxiv. 15, 16.

SERMON III.

Of Repentance.

Matth. iv. 17.

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

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THE *kingdom of Heaven*, or *the kingdom of God*, does uſually in the New-Teſtament, and particularly in the diſcourſes of our Saviour himſelf, ſignify the goſpel ſtate, that glorious model formed in the divine counſels for recovering ſinful men to their duty, and reſtoring them to the favour of God. The Deity has a ſupreme unalienable right to our obedience, which neceſſarily reſults from our relation to him as the workmanſhip of his hands, endued with thoſe powers which render us capable of knowing and doing his will, continually depending on him, and receiving favours from him. But when mankind had corrupted their ways, and fallen ſhort of the glory of God, it pleaſed him

him by a particular interpoſition to favour ſome of them with a poſitive revelation of his will, to reclaim them from their errors and lead them in the way to happineſs. For this end was the conſtitution of *Iſrael* form'd, which is ſignificantly and juſtly called a *Theocracy*; God himſelf was King, the laws were given by him, nay, and he kept in his own hand the laſt reſort of power in the execution. The people under that form of divine government, were the ſpecial favourites of heaven; God himſelf call'd them *a choſen nation* to him, *a peculiar treaſure*, *a kingdom of prieſts*, and our Saviour tells us that *ſalvation* was *of the* Jews. But whatever the ſpecial reaſons might be, taken from the *genius* of that people and the *circumſtances* of the time, there was in that œconomy a great mixture of ceremony and external pomp, which rendered it imperfect, and unfit to anſwer the more extenſive purpoſes of that grace, deſigned for mankind in the *fulneſs of time:* And therefore it muſt give way to a better conſtitution, a new kingdom of grace, which God erected and put into the hands of his ſon, to be wiſely and graciouſly adminiſtred by him, for turning *the diſobedient to the wiſdom of the juſt*, reducing to their duty the rebellious, not of one, but of all

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nations to whom it ſhould be publiſhed without diſtinction, and ſo bringing many to glory. It is the excellency of this laſt and beſt ſcheme, that it propoſes the firſt great principles of religion, with an admirable plainneſs, it gives ſuch inſtructions concerning the Deity, his moral perfections and his providence, and concerning the obligations and duties of morality, that is, of piety, temperance, righteouſneſs, and charity, as are moſt anſwerable to the natural ſentiments of mankind, and which our own hearts, if we ſeriouſly attend to them, cannot but approve; it preſcribes ſuch a pure, ſimple, and reaſonable worſhip as is worthy of God to accept, and of men to perform; it declares theſe terms of acceptance, accomodated to the frailty of our preſent ſtate, and the conſcious ſenſe we have of guilt, which gives the greateſt encouragement to ſinners who are willing to reform their lives and return to their duty, and at the ſame time, lays them under the greateſt and moſt indiſpenſable neceſſity of reforming; and it enforces our obedience to the laws of God in the ſtrongeſt manner, and by the moſt powerful motives, having brought *life and immortality to light*, and declared, that God has * *appointed a day wherein he will judge*

* Acts xvii. 31.

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the world in righteouſneſs by that man, whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given aſſurance unto all men, in that he hath raiſed him from the dead.

This is that *kingdom of heaven* which our lord ſays in my text was then *at hand*, it was begun to be erected, and the model of it would ſoon be compleated; and that men might be the qualified approved ſubjects of it, and entitled to the great ſalvation it propoſes, he exhorts them to *repent*. I ſhall at this time, *firſt*, conſider the duty of repentance, and then, lay before you ſome motives to the practice of it. Surely, this, if any thing in chriſtianity, is of importance to men. The whole ſtrain of the New Teſtament ſhews it to be of abſolute neceſſity. The moſt important conſequences depend upon it. The great author of our religion has told us that * *except* we *repent* we *ſhall periſh*. After the reſurrection of Chriſt, the apoſtles filled with the holy ghoſt, preſſed it upon men in this manner, *repent and be converted, that your ſins may be blotted out*, Acts iii. 19. The great doctrines of chriſtianity, which are declared to be of its very eſſence, do all point to it as their proper improvement. The death of Chriſt is repreſented as calling upon us to be *crucified* with him, to *mortify the*

* Luke xiii. 3.

SERM. III. *deeds of the body*, and to be *renewed in the ſpirit of our minds*, that is to repent. And that future judgment which God has appointed, and the declaration and aſſurance of which is a peculiar glory of the goſpel, ſtrongly enforces the ſame exhortation. Theſe conſiderations will, I hope, engage your attention to that firſt and great inſtruction which our Saviour gave to the world.

The original word which is generally uſed in the New Teſtament for repentance, does properly ſignify *a change of mind*, and very agreeable it is to the nature of the thing; for that religious repentance which God injoins, and peremptorily inſiſts on as the condition of forgiveneſs, and our obtaining his favour, is a change of our diſpoſitions from evil to good, and as the genuine fruit of it, the amendment of our lives. The goſpel ſuppoſes men to have univerſally *ſinned and come ſhort of the glory of God*, nay, it declares that thoſe to whom the great ſalvation was firſt offered, both Jews and Gentiles, were very corrupt. Among the Jews religion had degenerated into empty form, and trifling ceremonies were ſubſtituted in the place of ſubſtantial godlineſs and virtue. Under a ſpecious ſhew of outward ſanctity was covered reigning impiety,

impiety, pride, and covetouſneſs. The heathen were deep ſunk in all manner of wickedneſs, in adultery, fornication, laſciviouſneſs, revelling, drunkenneſs, unnatural contentions and animoſities. Such were the perſons whom Chriſt and his apoſtles called to repent, that is, to change their inclinations and tempers, to unlearn their vitious habits, to *bring forth fruits meet for amendment of life*, to become lovers of God and men, to *worſhip God in ſpirit and truth*, to be ſober, patient, meek, humble, juſt, and merciful.

This is what the firſt teachers of chriſtianity mean by repentance, which they ſo earneſtly and frequently inculcate, and they ſometimes repreſent it by different notions, but which amount to the ſame thing in effect; as, by *converſion to God*, that is, whereas men were in a vile ſubjection to ſins, ſerving diverſe luſts and pleaſures, they renounce the tyrannical uſurpation of thoſe *other lords who have had dominion over them*, and yield themſelves to God as their only rightful Lord, *to walk in his ways, and to keep his Commandments.* Sometimes it is repreſented under the images of a *new creation*, and a *reſurrection* or *revival from death* which ſignify that important moral change in

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the tempers and manners of men, when, from a doleful depravity, wherein reaſon and conſcience, and all the beſt ſentiments and affections of human nature, ſeem to be loſt or aſleep, and all the deſigns and purſuits of men are directed by ſelfiſh inferior appetites, or contracted vitious propenſities, when, I ſay from this wretched degeneracy they are recovered to the love and practice of *the things that are pure, and true, and juſt, and venerable, and virtuous; to ſeek the things that are above, to approve the good and acceptable, and perfect will of God, and to walk in newneſs of life.* Theſe repreſentations ſhew the efficacy of the goſpel and the grace of God, for effecting ſuch a change in men; but as it is all a voluntary change, wherein their own natural powers actively exert themſelves, the whole is comprehended under the duty of Repentance. Still it is to be remember'd, that the eſſence of repenting, conſiſts in prevailing good inclinations, contrary to the evil ones which had the aſcendant before, and good works directly oppoſite to thoſe wicked ones of which ſinners had been guilty. Thus, *John Baptiſt* who firſt declared the coming of God's kingdom, and taught the doctrine of repentance for the remiſſion of ſins, when, having in general, exhorted

exhorted his hearers to repent, they aſked him more particularly what he meant by it, and what he would have them to do, explains it thus, *Luke* iii. from ver. 11. accommodating his exhortation to their various circumſtances; the common people he directed, inſtead of outward ceremonies and forms, in which the religion of that time chiefly conſiſted, to abound in works of ſubſtantial piety and charity, and to give out of their plenty for the relief of their indigent fellow-creatures; the collectors of taxes, called *Publicans*, he exhorted to perform what was given them in charge juſtly and mercifully, never extorting from any man more than what the due and faithful diſcharge of their truſt required; and the ſoldiers, that they ſhould not behave themſelves inſolently and oppreſſively, but *be content with their wages*. This was the Baptiſt's doctrine of repentance, and it may very eaſily, by parity of reaſons, be applied to all the various relations, circumſtances, and conditions in human life. In general, let men forſake their wicked ways and unrighteous doings, and turn to the Lord, practiſing the virtues which are contrary to their former vices. And in particular, *Let him that ſtole, ſteal no more*; let him that has been covetous, break

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SERM. III. break off his sins *by shewing mercy to the poor*; let the lewd and voluptuous become chaste and temperate; the wrathful and contentious *put on bowels of mercies, humbleness of mind, forbearing and forgiving* the weak and the injurious; in fine, let us * *put off the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.* All the sacred writers with one consent, continually urge men to this, as the only effectual way to obtain reconciliation with God, and the remission of all their sins. The prophets under the Old Testament insist upon it as well as Christ and his apostles, assuring the *Jews*, that without it all their sacrifices and other external rites would be unavailable to their acceptance with God; that indeed God was ready to forgive their iniquities; *though* their *sins* were *as scarlet*, and *red like crimson*, he would make them *white as snow and wool*; but it is upon the condition of their *washing* and *making them clean, putting away the evil of their doings, ceasing to do evil, and learning to do well* ||. No more taking pleasure in their former sinful courses, rigorously exacting the labours and services of the poor, and

* Ephes. iv. 22, 24. || Isaiah i. 16. 18.

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grinding their faces by oppreſſion, but *dealing their bread to the hungry, and cloathing the naked* ||: in ſhort, exerciſing themſelves univerſally in the works of true piety and righteouſneſs. Sorrow for ſin, and what is called contrition, humiliation for having offended God, and perverted that which is right; the confeſſing of our iniquities with ſhame and grief, and pious virtuous inclinations, a deſire to become holy as God is holy; all theſe are neceſſary to repentance, but it is a fatal miſtake to imagine, that it eſſentially conſiſts, and is compleated in any, or all of them; or, that any thing will be accepted without what I have already mentioned, a thorough and effectual forſaking all ſin, and turning to God, and to the practice of our duty, univerſally. Theſe preparatory exerciſes and diſpoſitions of the mind, ariſe from the reaſon of things, and the very frame of our nature. As repentance is the rational exerciſe of the ſoul, wherein its intellectual and active powers are deliberately employed, what firſt and naturally occurs to the reflecting thoughts of a penitent, is, his former conduct; and he cannot review it otherwiſe than with an ingenuous remorſe and ſelf-abhorrence. When a Man conſi-

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|| Iſa. lviii. 7.

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ders that he has done wrong, it is impoſſible to avoid a deep concern; for it is the higheſt pleaſure to be juſtified to ourſelves, and the reproaches of a ſelf-accuſing heart are moſt painful; and this is the beſt and moſt effectual preſervative from a relapſe into former follies. * *Sorrow after a godly ſort*, as the apoſtle ſays, is naturally productive of *fear*, and *zeal*, and *carefulneſs*; *fear* of offending God for the future, a *zeal* and *care* to pleaſe him in all things. And as this is the true foundation of repentance, that it may be firm and ſtable, nothing is more neceſſary for us to attend to, than that our *ſorrow* be of the kind I juſt now mentioned, *after a godly ſort*. There may be a grief even for ſin, which is of another character; that is, when the penal and pernicious conſequences of it only are conſidered, eſpecially, the diſgrace and the miſeries to which it expoſes ſinners in this world. Such a ſorrow is really no more than a painful ſenſe of natural evil or unhappineſs; and if ſin is only conſidered, as the occaſion of that, without entering into its moral deformity, we can never imagine that ſorrow ariſing thence, has any thing in it of that ingenuous remorſe which is acceptable to God; or that it will produce, or in-

* 2 Cor. vii. 9—11.

deed

deed at all tends to, a real amendment. But, the mind that grieves after a godly ſort dwells on the conſideration of ſin as it is in itſelf, and in the lights wherein the ſcripture ſets it; it conſiders moral evil as an error, as unbecoming the rational nature, as a deviation from the eternal and unchangeable meaſures of right, as offenſive to, and diſapproved by, the beſt of all beings, as ingratitude to a benefactor who continually loads us with his favours, and exerciſes towards us the moſt amazing patience and tender compaſſion; to all which the goſpel adds, that moſt powerful motive taken from the death and paſſion of Chriſt. Our glorious redeemer was, as the prophet ſpeaks of him, *a man of ſorrows and acquainted with grief* ‡; and after a life of deep humiliation, poverty and contempt, endured a moſt ignominious and painful death. And, when we remember that he ſuffered and paſt through all his ſcenes of grief for our ſakes, *that he might redeem us from all our iniquities, and purify to himſelf a peculiar people zealous of good works* *; and finally bring us to the poſſeſſion of an eternal reſt and bleſſedneſs in heaven; when I ſay, all this is conſidered, it muſt be a hard heart that does not relent, that can *look to* SERM. III.

‡ Iſa. liii. 3. * Titus ii. 14.

him

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him that was pierced for our ſins, and not *mourn and be in bitterneſs.*

It is likewiſe very natural for men convinced, and ſenſibly affected with the remembrance of their tranſgreſſions, to confeſs them to God whom they have offended. Nature dictates a way of expreſſing our ſorrows, and reaſon tells us that ſorrow for injuries done, ſhould be uttered in acknowledgments to the perſon injured. We are very ready to expect and demand it when wrong is done *us*, and can we queſtion the equity of paying it when our hearts tells us *we* have done wrong; eſpecially, this homage is due to the ſupreme being, when we have affronted and provoked him by violating his righteous laws. The confeſſion of ſin is a reproaching ourſelves in the bitterneſs of our ſpirits, as polluted by the moſt nauſeous and loathſome thing, which we can no longer bear. It is, as the ſcripture ſpeaks, *taking to ourſelves ſhame, and confuſion of face*, and juſtifying God whom our tranſgreſſions diſhonoured, making a ſolemn acknowledgment of the reaſonableneſs of his laws, and the righteouſneſs of the ſentence which he has pronounced againſt the evil deeds of men. At the ſame time, it gives glory to his mercy and the truth of his promiſe,

miſe, that he will *pardon iniquity, tranſ-* SERM.
greſſion, and ſin; the hope of which, far III.
from leſſening the malignity of ſin, in the view of a penitent, it increaſes it rather, as the prophet ſays, in the name of the Lord. *Ezekiel* xvi. 63. *Thou ſhalt remember, and be aſhamed and confounded, and never open thy mouth, becauſe of thy ſhame, when I am pacified towards thee for all that thou haſt done.* For theſe reaſons, the confeſſion of ſin is often enjoin'd in ſcripture, and great promiſes are made to the ſincere perfomance of it; yet the ſtreſs is not laid on the performance itſelf, but the value of it depends on its tendency to a reformation, which, chiefly, is well-pleaſing to God.

The reſult will certainly be a change of mind and affections from evil to good, a diſpoſition to alter our courſe of action; for it is altogether an inconſiſtent ſuppoſition, that we ſhould be ſorry for having offended, and acknowledge it with ſhame, at the ſame time reſolving that we will continue in the ſame courſe. But ſtill all theſe are only preparations for repentance, it is not finiſh'd in them. It's true characteriſtic is a deliberate and reſolved change of temper and behaviour; a firm purpoſe of amendment thoroughly executed; reſolving to *keep God's righteous judg-*

ments,

SERM. III. *ments*, and immediately entering upon the actual performance of it; no more *fashioning* ourselves *according to the former lusts in ignorance*, but *as he that hath called us is holy*, becoming *holy in all manner of conversation* *.

To convince us of this, which I take to be a point of very great moment; let us, *first*, consider the express declarations of scripture concerning it. The apostle *Paul* discoursing of godly sorrow, (and certainly none can have a better character, it comprehends every good qualification of sorrow for sin) says †, *it worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of*; not that it is repentance unto salvation, for he maketh a plain difference as between the means and the end; the occasion or preparation and the effect. Besides, in a great many other passages, a pious and virtuous life, a persevering obedience and *patient continuance in well doing*, is the condition of our obtaining eternal life; which indeed is contained in repentance, but not in sorrow, confession of sin, or good inclinations. On the other hand, a vitious character and wicked behaviour, disqualifies men for the kingdom of God, whatever their griefs, humiliations, and pious desires,

* 1 Pet. i. 15. † 2 Cor. vii. 10.

and

and purposes may be. The † *adulterer*, the *sorcerer*, the *railer*, the *covetous*, the *drunkard*, *shall not inherit the kingdom of God*, tho' they should often with deep humility and regret confess their sins, and in their confessions and griefs incline and resolve to alter their course of life; yet they do it not, *but it* happens *to them according to the proverb*, as St. *Peter* expresses it, ‖ *The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire.* SERM. III.

I think no attentive person can doubt but this is the doctrine of the holy scriptures upon the head of repentance; at least, that a virtuous course of life, *ordering our conversations aright*, being *undefiled in the way*, *walking in the law of the Lord*, *doing no iniquity*, *and keeping God's precepts* diligently, is absolutely and indispensably necessary to our being blessed in enjoying the favour of God. It is a wonder that any christians should have gone into other sentiments, some even in speculation and opinion, many more in the secret fond presumption of their hearts, not supported by any avowed principle, imagining that humiliation, and contrition, and ineffectual purposes of amendment, would at last be sufficient to their acceptance with

† 1 Cor. vi. 9. ‖ 2 Pet. ii. 22.

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God. If it were true, that repentance conſiſts in theſe things, yet is it not evident from a multitude of ſcripture declarations, indeed from the intire ſtrain of them, that a good life according to the mercy of the goſpel covenant, that is, ſincerely prevailing, though imperfect holineſs in all manner of converſation, is the condition of eternal life? and therefore to underſtand the goſpel conſiſtently, we muſt conclude, that either repentance is not ſufficient of itſelf, to entitle to forgiveneſs and acceptance with God, or a perſevering conformity to the divine law is included in it, which ſeems to be the juſter explication.

But, we may be farther ſatisfied, that repentance, as the term of forgiveneſs and reconciliation to God, does not conſiſt wholly in theſe particulars already mentioned, by truſting to which many deceive themſelves; we may, I ſay, be ſatisfied of this, by conſidering the reaſon of the thing; for, in the *firſt* place, it cannot be reaſonably thought that God has any delight in the ſorrow of his creatures, meerly for its own ſake, becauſe, that is contrary to his perfect goodneſs, which takes pleaſure in the happineſs of all beings who are capable of it; and the ſcripture tells us, that he delights in the

the prosperity and joy of his servants. If we could at all suppose that the griefs of sinners are pleasing to the Deity as separated from the proper effect of them in their reformation; then still the more intense their griefs are, the more pleasing they would be, and consequently the hopeless anguish of the accursed objects of his wrath, would, as being the bittereſt and the most painful, be the most acceptable, the howlings of the damned be more grateful in his ears, than the ingenuous mournings of the penitent, which every one will judge to be absurd. Let us put the case of a human superior who has bowels of compassion; will he take any pleasure in the sorrows of an offending subject any farther than as they are the salutary presages of amendment? Will a father delight in the piercing griefs of his child, or even a judge in the affliction of a malefactor? No otherwise, certainly, than as their future obedience may be thereby secured. We ought not, then, to think that the best of all beings, the most merciful father even of his prodigal children, the most compassionate judge, who does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men, will regard with pleasure and approbation, the deepest sorrows and humiliations of sinners on any SERM. III.

SERM. III. other account, than as they are means in order to the end which he certainly approves, the bettering of their hearts, and reforming their converſations; and therefore we muſt conclude, that the repentance which God accepts is not conſummated, nor principally conſiſts, in ſorrow for ſin.

Secondly, The ſame judgment is to be made of confeſſion, in which our penitence muſt not reſt, nor will God approve it unleſs it end in the forſaking of ſin; which *Solomon* comprehends in the condition of our obtaining mercy. *Prov.* xxviii. 13. *He that covereth his ſin, ſhall not proſper, but whoſo confeſſeth and forſaketh ſhall have mercy.* I do not ſpeak here only of a formal acknowledgment in words, which without the ſincere and ingenuous contrition of the heart, cannot be pleaſing to God, for it is hypocriſy; but, let us ſuppoſe it ever ſo ſerious, and accompanied with the deepeſt remorſe and ſelf-abaſement, it is only ſo far valuable as it terminates in holineſs of heart and life. Conſider how we would judge in a parallel caſe of our own. Suppoſe a child, a ſervant, a friend, or a neighbour, is guilty of a treſpaſs, and makes profeſſion of grief for it; humanity and chriſtian charity require us to forgive

forgive the wrong; but it is always taken for granted, that the injurious ſhall not relapſe into his former offences, but that his future conduct ſhall be juſt, reſpectful, and obliging; when it happens otherwiſe, and the conduct continues uninfluenced, and as bad as before, a repetition in that caſe of ſuch fruitleſs profeſſions is in itſelf offenſive, and rather ſerves to heighten the provocation; and, if it be ſo, we cannot but imagine that God will count it an indignity, if his ſinful creatures treat him after the ſame manner; if after many provocations, they, in order to obtain his favour, only make a confeſſion of their guilt, and inſtead of forſaking their evil ways, return to them again. SERM. III.

And, in the *laſt* place, the diſpoſitions and purpoſes of the mind will be unavailable, and are not true repentance unleſs they are followed with a ſuitable practice. Let us judge in this caſe as we do in all others concerning the abilities the qualities, the accompliſhments, natural and moral, of the human ſoul. Reaſon itſelf, the diſtinguiſhing excellence of our nature, is diſcovered only by our conduct; if a creature in human ſhape ſhould ſhow by its actions no other faculties than thoſe which belong to the brutal kind, it could not be acknowledged

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to be of our ſpecies. But, particularly, in determining characters and qualities of men, we have always a recourſe to their behaviour. Thus we diſtinguiſh between a wiſe man and a fool, between juſt and unjuſt, between grateful and ungrateful, between a friend and an enemy; for theſe are never conſidered as, nor indeed are they in their own nature, idle, unactive qualities, reſting in the mind. Diſpoſitions are in order to action, and have a neceſſary relation to it, particular diſpoſitions to particular courſes of action, and without them, are to all intents and purpoſes to be conſidered as if they had no being.

After the ſame manner let us judge of repentance, conſidered as a diſpoſition in the mind. To what is it a diſpoſition? ſurely to obedience, to the expreſſions of love and gratitude to God and hatred of ſin, to a courſe of action oppoſite to the former which is now repented of. Without that obedience, therefore, thoſe expreſſions of love and gratitude to God, and hatred of ſin, and without that change of our courſe of action, it muſt be accounted empty and void. The ſinner very well knows how his former diſpoſitions, he now pretends to repent of, and to have changed, exerted themſelves; they were

were not unactive, they produced a multitude of tranſgreſſions, not in thought only, but in word and deed; and ſhall not his now contrary repenting diſpoſitions, inclinations, and purpoſes, exert themſelves in the contrary works? SERM. III.

But, let us lay ever ſo great ſtreſs on all theſe particulars which are ingredients in repentance, or rather preparations for it, and tendencies towards it, on ſorrows for ſin, deep contrition, confeſſions and pious diſpoſitions, religious inclinations and purpoſes, let us even make the ſuppoſition, that the eſſence of repentance were in them, this important queſtion will remain, how does their ſincerity appear? It is an acknowledg'd principle, that nothing called religion can be acceptable to the Deity, let it be faith, repentance, obedience, charity, or whatſoever virtue or good work ſo called, it cannot, I ſay, be acceptable without being ſincere. Now, let any one judge whether there can be in the nature of the thing any evidence, without good works, or *fruits meet for the amendment of life*, as the ſcripture calls them, of theſe inward diſpoſitions and affections, religious inclinations and purpoſes, or of godly ſorrow for ſin, or any ſatisfying

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evidence that men are ſincere in confeſſing their ſins.

Nay, upon the unhappy ſuppoſition that our repentance is thus imperfect, that we are ſorry for our ſins, confeſs them, and purpoſe to reform, without actually reforming; our guilt is thereby greatly aggravated, and the *ſeparation between us and our God*, which our iniquities have made, is increaſed. I do not now put the caſe of inſincerity, which is always diſpleaſing to that God who *loves truth in the inward parts*, but allowing that men really, and in earneſt are grieved for their tranſgreſſions, and confeſs them with deep contrition of ſoul; upon that ſuppoſition, if it can be made, without amendment of life, the ſins in which they continue are very much heightened, becauſe they are committed againſt the plaineſt and moſt ſenſible connections of their own minds, and ſtill the affront to God is the greater, the more it is done in defiance of light, and with our eyes open.

I cannot now finiſh what I intended in this diſcourſe, and ſhall for this time conclude with exhorting you to conſider ſeriouſly,

riouſly, the abſolute, indiſpenſable neceſ- SERM.
ſity, of breaking off your ſins by actual III.
thorough amendment; by *turning our feet to God's teſtimonies, making haſte to keep his commandments* *. Which that we may all ſincerely do, God of his infinite mercy grant.

* Pſalm cxix. 60.

SER-

SERMON IV.

Of Repentance.

Matth. iv. 17.

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

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IN a former diſcourſe from theſe words, I endeavoured to explain the nature of that true repentance, which the ſcripture declares to be ſo abſolutely and indiſpenſably neceſſary to our acceptance with God. And what I intend at this time principally to inſiſt on, are, the motives whereby this moſt important duty is urg'd upon us. But one obſervation will *firſt* be uſefully made in order to our underſtanding it better, and applying what is ſaid concerning it with greater advantage to ourſelves, that is, concerning the difference between the repentance originally preach'd to ſinners, both Jews and Heathens, as the condition of their entrance into the chriſtian ſtate, and that which is

is required of thoſe who ſin wilfully under the chriſtian profeſſion. The goſpel was firſt declared to ſuch as, by the account it gives of them, were very ignorant and very wicked; *all fleſh had corrupted their ways, and the whole world became guilty before God.* The religion of the Jews had degenerated into empty formality; external rites and ceremonies, were put in the place of ſubſtantial piety and virtue: And the Gentiles were *dead in treſpaſſes and ſins, fooliſh and diſobedient, ſerving diverſe luſts and pleaſures.* Such were they whom our Saviour and his apoſtles called to repentance, to an entire change of their tempers and their manner of life, to become new creatures, to *put off the old man and be renewed after the image of God, in righteouſneſs and true holineſs.* To this purpoſe very ſtrong motives were ſet before them, taken from the death and reſurrection of Chriſt, and from the hope of a glorious immortality, which Jeſus Chriſt brought to light; and they came under a ſolemn obligation by baptiſm, which was a ſeal of their religious profeſſion, and a ſacred engagement upon them *to walk in newneſs of life,* as the apoſtles explain it. A perſevering courſe of ſincere obedience, as the condition of their claim to the benefits of the

SERM. IV.

SERM. IV. the new covenant, was what all the followers of Chriſt were underſtood to be bound to, as the genuine effect, I may ſay, the continuation of that repentance which was begun at their converſion to chriſtianity, baptiſm. This repentance was ſuppoſed, when once ſincerely begun, never to be revoked, nor to need to be repeated, as the apoſtle ſpeaks, 2 *Cor.* vii. 10. *not to be repented of*; as the ſeal of it was never to be received but once; and therefore, in the 6th chapter to the *Hebrews*, repentance from dead works, as well as faith, and in conſequence of both, baptiſm is reckon'd as the foundation of chriſtianity not to be laid again.

To ſuppoſe men called to repent in the ſame manner as at their firſt profeſſing the religion of Chriſt, is to ſuppoſe that the foundation is deſtroy'd, that in effect they have departed from chriſtianity, and renounced their baptiſm; thus falling from grace and returning to that ſtate of *death in treſpaſſes and ſins* wherein the world lay, like the unconverted Gentiles who walked in the *vanity of their minds*, and according to their *former luſts in ignorance*; and this is a ſuppoſition which is not made in the general

ſtrain

ſtrain of the New Teſtament writings, (as it was not reaſonable it ſhould) they are, therefore, to be underſtood in treating of repentance, to mean the firſt converſion of ſinners, by the grace of God that brings ſalvation, *from dead idols to the ſervice of the living God*; from an impious and immoral converſation in worldly luſts, to a ſober righteous and godly life; in which they are bound by the laws of their religion and their covenant with God to perſevere and go on to perfection. Its true, chriſtians are in ſome ſenſe oblig'd daily to repent; that is, whereas this is an imperfect ſtate, and they are liable to failures thro' ſurpriſing temptations, remaining ignorance, and many infirmities which compaſs them about, they ought continually by impartial ſelf-examination to find out theſe failings, to regret them humbly, and ſet themſelves in oppoſition to them, aſpiring to higher meaſures of perfection, *leaving the things that are behind, and reaching forth to thoſe things which are before as the* * *Apoſtle ſpeaks.* But, this is not what the ſacred writers mean by repentance, but becoming new creatures, turning from a wicked and ungodly life to a ſincere holineſs and virtue; and their doctrine is, that ſincere chriſtians SERM. IV.

* Philip. iii. 13, 14.

being

SERM. IV. being born of God, born of water and of the Spirit, that is, truly repenting and being baptized, they do not, they cannot ſin, becauſe the *divine ſeed abides in them*; they do not commit ſin, ſo as to be its ſervants, and under its dominion any more.

Nevertheleſs, it is a caſe which may be ſuppoſed, for it is ſometimes fact, and the inſpired writers themſelves affirm it to be ſo, that men under the profeſſion of the goſpel fall into thoſe courſes, and into theſe practices which are utterly inconſiſtent with ſincerity; *they* * *ſin wilfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, and depart from the holy commandment which was delivered unto them.* Not only an open and avowed rejecting of chriſtianity, which ſome in the primitive times were guilty of, and it was extremely difficult to renew them again unto repentance; not only this, I ſay, but any wilful, deliberate ſinning againſt the light and conviction of men's own minds, any known criminal practices frequently repeated, any of thoſe things *for the ſake of which the wrath of God cometh on the children of diſobedience*, as adultery, fornication, drunkenneſs, fraud, violence, oppreſſion, or others of a like nature and malignity, any of them

* Heb. x. 26.

knowingly

knowingly and wilfully committed, eſpe- SERM.
cially relapſed into, after profeſſed ſorrow IV.
and purpoſes of amendment, is a violation of the chriſtian covenant, a forfeiture of our claim to the favour of God according to the laws of the goſpel, and ſubjects ſinners to his indignation. What in this caſe is to be done? I have ſaid already theſe are not the perſons to whom the doctrine of repentance was originally preached, nor to whoſe condition it is accommodated in the general ſtrain of the New Teſtament. Indeed their condition is much worſe, their guilt is more aggravated by ſuch bold and preſumptuous defiance to the light of their own conſciences, and contempt of the goſpel grace; the ſpirit of God is grieved, their hearts more hardened, and their reformation rendered more difficult, as St. *Peter* ſays, 2d epiſt. ii. 21. *It were better for them not to have known the way of righteouſneſs, than after they have known it to turn from the holy commandment.*

But after all there is no other remedy; repent they muſt or periſh. Tho' the ſcripture ſpeaks but ſparingly of their caſe, and of that duty with an application to it, as it is not reaſonable ſuch ample encouragement ſhould be given to them as to thoſe who ſinn'd

SERM. IV. sinn'd in ignorance, and whose sins were in some sense connived at, yet the plain reason of the case will direct them to this, as the only way for obtaining forgiveness and salvation, notwithstanding all the disadvantages they have brought themselves under, and all the disabilities they have contracted for performing it. And yet the scripture is not wholly silent concerning this case, and the necessity, and even the hopefulness of repenting in it. The prophets often call upon the Jews (whose condition in this respect was parallel to that of christians) in such terms as these, * *return ye backsliding children, for I am married to you.* The covenant on God's part shall still stand, if ye will forsake the sins by which you have violated it and revolted from him; and † *tho' thou hast plaid the harlot with many lovers, yet return to me saith the Lord.* That is, for so the figurative expression signifies, tho' thou art guilty of heinous aggravated offences, and particularly of idolatry, which was an essential breach of the covenant, yet there is room for repentance. And in the New Testament, as we find the case of apostacy supposed, or of insincerity, that is of wilful transgressions under the christian profession

* Jer. iii. 14. † Jer. iii. 1.

and

and the wrath of God denounced againſt it, which is principally intended for the admonition of chriſtians, that they do not fall into ſuch ſin; yet a reſerve for the repentance of thoſe who are ſo guilty is not obſcurely inſinuated. The apoſtle *Paul* refers to a fact of this ſort which happened among the Corinthians. One, and probably a teacher of no inconſiderable character, was guilty of ſuch fornication as was not named even among the Gentiles, * *that a man ſhould have his father's wife.* Becauſe the example was of a very infectious nature, and highly reproachful to chriſtianity, it was neceſſary that it ſhould be cenſured with a peculiar ſeverity; accordingly, the apoſtle, by virtue of his extraordinary miraculous power, delivered the offender to *ſatan*, meaning, that ſome uncommon temporal judgment was inflicted upon him. But what was the intention? was it that he ſhould be immediately overwhelmed and ſwallowed up in remedileſs ruin? no, *but for* † *the deſtruction of the fleſh, that the ſpirit might be ſaved in the day of Jeſus Chriſt.* That is, that the ſinner might be reſtored to a good ſtate, and the hope of eternal life by repentance. And, SERM. IV.

* 1. Cor. v. 1. † 1. Cor. v. 5.

 therefore,

SERM. IV. therefore, when the punishment had its due effect in the humiliation and repentance of the offender, the apostle exhorts the saints at Corinth to comfort him as a penitent, and receive him again into their fellowship. In the epistle to the seven churches of *Asia*, *Revel.* chap. 2d, and 3d, some are charged, with great defection, and the divine displeasure is denounced against them, they are threatned with the *removal of their candlestick out of its place*, and other punishments; but still upon the supposition of impenitency; and it is expressly declared, that if they did repent, their destruction should be prevented. *Nay*, some of the most notorious transgressors, who seduced the servants of Christ into grosly immoral practices, are threatned indeed with death, but it is, *except they repent*. The apostle *Peter* himself is an example for the encouragement of offending disciples of Christ to repent; thro' fear he denied his master before men, for which sin his master pronounces a severe punishment; but he obtained mercy, having with deep sorrow for his sin returned to a better mind and better resolution, which he testified thro' the whole course of his after life, and even at his death.

There

There is, therefore, repentance alſo *granted* even to them who profeſſing chriſtianity have deliberately and preſumptuouſly ſinned againſt its laws; and their repentance is of the ſame kind with that which the goſpel deſcribes in the caſe of converted infidels: a thorough forſaking, and *purging the conſcience from dead works, to ſerve the living God, ſprinkling the hearts from an evil conſcience, and waſhing the body with pure water.* Let them never imagine that their condition is any thing the better for their having been chriſtians before the committing of their iniquities, and that from thence there remains any foundation of hope for them; their habitual courſe of wickedneſs utterly inconſiſtent with integrity, forfeits the chriſtian character, and with it all claim to the privileges of the goſpel covenant. Their ſtate is that of a total alienation from God; and their converſion to him, that it may be ſincere and acceptable, muſt be attended with an entire change of diſpoſition and converſation, from evil to good: As *David* in his penitential exerciſes, after the moſt heinous tranſgreſſion of his life, addreſſes God, not only with a deprecation of his diſpleaſure for that particular offence,

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SERM. IV. nor indeed, only, with a desire and purpose of amending it, but with the utmost solicitude that he might be wholly renewed; in the same manner as a new convert to religion would do, after an universally profligate and abandoned life *according to his lusts in ignorance,* * *create in me a clean heart, O Lord, and renew a right spirit within me.* Nay, if there be any difference, it is this, that the repentance of such sinners ought to be peculiarly remarkable and conspicuous, as their iniquities have been accompanied with peculiar aggravations; and, especially, let it be remembred, that nothing can be to them a satisfying evidence of their sincerity, but an effectual amendment, an intire, resolved, abstinence from their former iniquities, and the steddy exercise of the contrary virtues.

I come, in the next place, to lay before you the gospel motives to repentance. But, before I enter upon them, it may not be amiss to consider a little the reasonableness of the thing itself, and its agreeableness to our natural sentiments. We have indeed this invaluable advantage by the gospel revelation, that it adds new and very powerful

* Psalm li. 10.

inducements

inducements to our obeying the eternal and immutable laws of God; but ſtill the firſt conſideration which takes faſt hold on the minds of men, is, that the things which thoſe laws injoin are excellent and right things, moſt becoming a reaſonable nature, and tending to its perfection, and its higheſt ſelf enjoyment. SERM. IV.

Now, I think it will appear to every attentive perſon very rational and fit, that we ſhould undo what we have done amiſs; that if we have gone into any wrong courſe, we ſhould not perſevere in it, but upon conviction abandon it; that we ſhould renounce our errors, and if we have done iniquity, reſolve that we will do it no more; that is, that we ſhould repent. It is true, indeed, that repentance is not directly contained in the original obligation of the law of nature, for it primarily injoins what is good without ſuppoſing the caſe of a departure from it; but in the event of ſin, it imports a plain conſequential obligation to forſake it, and return to our duty, as being that only which we can reaſonably do in ſuch circumſtances, and whereby we can only have hope towards God, or be approved by ourſelves.

But

SERM. IV. But, *if the times of ignorance God winked at, he now commands all men every where to repent*; having publiſhed his law of grace and that remedy which his mercy had found out for ſinners. The kingdom of heaven is come, that new goſpel conſtitution *wherein the righteouſneſs of God is revealed from faith to faith*; *he has declared himſelf merciful to the unrighteouſneſs of the penitent, and that their ſins and tranſgreſſions he will remember no more.* That law which is the unalterable rule of right is cleared from the obſcurities in which the ignorance and prejudices of men had involved it; there is a full diſcovery of that which is good and acceptable to the Deity, and he has aſcertained a *glorious reward to them who diligently ſeek him.*

From this general character of the kingdom of heaven, or of chriſtianity, you will ſee that it contains very ſtrong motives to repentance. The *firſt* I mention, is taken from the hope of ſucceſs. This is the greateſt encouragement, and does moſt effectually determine men to any valuable deſign, endeavours, or purſuit. The end is obtaining the favour of God, which is of ſo great moment, that one would think men ſhould exert

ert their utmoſt power, and uſe the greateſt diligence for it, conſidering themſelves as guilty, and under a forfeiture. The impreſſion of this has been ſo ſtrong on the minds of men, that all nations, ſenſible of having offended the Deity, have laboured to appeaſe him, tho' for the moſt part by methods very diſagreeable to reaſon, and to our moſt natural notions of the ſupreme Being. Repentance, indeed, is what the light of nature dictates, and all men who conſider it, are convinced it is abſolutely neceſſary to a reconciliation; but an expreſs aſſurance from God, that it will be accepted, muſt be acknowledged an invaluable advantage; and this we have by the chriſtian revelation. For however the divine goodneſs manifeſted by its liberal effects, and extending to all kinds of beings who are capable objects of it, might induce us to hope that God will be favourable to penitents, and make a difference between the obſtinately wicked and imperfectly good, who in the general tenor of their actions ſincerely do what is lawful and right, tho' not without a mixture of infirmities; yet, ſtill there might remain a ſuſpicion that the wiſe governor of the world might ſee it fit to inflict ſome degrees SERM. IV.

SERM. IV. of puniſhment in a future ſtate on thoſe who ſinned in this life, even altho' they have repented. But this anxiety is ſuperſeded, and ſtrong conſolation is provided for penitents, by a poſitive declaration from a perſon who has a plenary authority ſufficiently atteſted, that God will receive them into favour as if they had never ſinned, and that there is reſerved for them a compleat and eternal felicity hereafter.

The method in which this mercy is diſpenſed carries in it very ſtrong arguments to enforce our duty, I mean, repentance and its genuine fruits. It is by the mediation of Chriſt; by the ſhedding of his blood, * *they are made near to God, who were far off*; and he † *was raiſed from the dead for their juſtification, ſaving to the uttermoſt all that come to God by him, becauſe he ever lives to make interceſſion for them* ‡. Now, this lays us under the moſt endearing obligation of gratitude to our Saviour, *who gave himſelf for us, to redeem us from all our* || *iniquities, and to purify unto himſelf a peculiar people zealous of good works.* The New Teſtament writers ſo repreſent both the death and reſurrection of

* Epheſ. ii. 13. † Rom. iv. 25. ‡ Heb. vii. 25.
|| Tit. ii. 14.

Chriſt,

Chriſt, as it appears to be their great deſign to bring ſinners to repentance, or to amendment and newneſs of life. *We are buried with him in baptiſm unto death*, (ſaith St. *Paul*, *Rom.* vi. 4.) *that as Chriſt was raiſed up from the dead by the glory of the father, ſo we ſhould walk in newneſs of life.* And thus he reaſons, 2d of *Cor.* v. 14, 15. *the love of Chriſt conſtraineth us becauſe we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all once dead, that they that live ſhould no more live to themſelves, but to him that died for them and roſe again.* In his other epiſtles he ſpeaks often in the ſame ſtrain, and to the ſame effect, deſcribing our repentance as the very image and reſemblance of Chriſt's crucifixion and riſing to glory, for he calls it *being crucified and riſing with him, putting off the body of the ſins of the fleſh thro' the faith of the operation of God, and putting on the new man, and being renewed in the ſpirit of our minds.* The ſame doctrine is taught by St. *Peter*, 1ſt, ep. iv. 1. *Foraſmuh as Chriſt hath ſuffered for us in the fleſh, arm yourſelves likewiſe with the ſame mind; for he that hath ſuffered in the fleſh hath ceaſed from ſin.* SERM. IV.

Another argument for repentance becauſe the kingdom of God, or chriſtianity is come, is taken from the clear light of the goſpel; and

SERM. IV. and certainly a great weight is added to the obligation of our duty by the full and plain discovery of it; in effect the revelation of our whole duty is in this view the enforcement of repentance, which is nothing else but the practice of whatsoever is good, and pure, and virtuous, in opposition to *former lusts in ignorance. The former times God winked at, but now commands all men to repent.* He had great compassion for them who lived in times of error, who were very ill taught, and received a corrupt conversation by tradition of their fathers, without any means of delivering themselves, but merely their own reason, which indeed, if duely attended to, might have discovered the folly and wickedness of the Idolatry and immorality which then prevailed, but in the generality of men was so weak and unimproved, thro' the unhappiness of their education, that it had very little influence; and its feeble effects were easily overborn by the clamor of imposture, prejudices, and vicious customs. But, now, that God has sent his son into the world to reveal his will to mankind, and he has done it with such perspecuity that he *who runs may read*, and understand it, they must be inexcusable who continue impenitent

tent and disobedient; * *and the servant, who knowing his Lord's will, does not prepare himself to do it, will deserve to be beaten with many stripes.* SERM. IV.

I may add, under this head, the gracious assistance which the gospel affords that men may be led to repentance. It is the glory of christianity to be the *ministration of the spirit.* Not only was the holy Ghost sent down from heaven to attest it by miraculous gifts and operations at first, but the divine comforter abides always with the followers of Christ, to instruct them, to lead them in the way of truth, and incline them to the practice of their duty. Now as all their obedience is summed up in repentance, from which consolation naturally arises, and to the increase whereof it tends, the operations of the Holy Spirit may be said to have this for their end. The prophet *Zechariah* foretelling the glory of the last days, or of the christian dispensation when the most perfect model of religion should take place, and real piety and virtue should flourish, says chap. xii. 10. *It shall come to pass saith the Lord, that I will pour on the house of* David *and the inhabitants of* Jerusalem, *the spirit of grace and of supplications,*

* Luke xii. 47.

SERM. IV. *cations, and they ſhall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they ſhall mourn and be in bitterneſs.* The Holy Spirit then pour'd out abundantly ſhall incline men to repent, and from a ſenſe of their former ſins, to renounce them with abhorrence, and do no more wickedly. When ſuch aids are offer'd to us, and the Spirit of God ſtrives, in order to reclaim and reform us, it muſt be a high aggravation of wickedneſs to reſiſt him, and by ſuch *hardneſs and* * *impenitence of heart men treaſure up to themſelves wrath againſt the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.* What more cou'd have been done on God's part that he has not done? he not only calls upon us by the voice of reaſon and nature, which loudly proclaims his glory and our duty, and exerciſes great patience and long ſuffering towards us; nay, he not only has appointed a propitiation for our ſins, and thereby given us the moſt ſolemn and ſatisfying aſſurances of pardon, that by the hope of it we might be animated to a dutiful return to him; but he had ſuch pity on our weakneſs, tho' it was in a great meaſure criminal, and contracted by our own fault, that he ſends his

* Rom. ii. 5.

Holy

Holy Spirit to help our infirmities, to enlighten our darkneſs, and to ſtrengthen our feeble powers; and if after all we will remain impenitent, and defeat the beſt means, and gracious efforts of mercy for our recovery, our ruin muſt be wholly charg'd on ourſelves. SERM. IV.

And, *laſtly*, the kingdom of heaven, or the goſpel, has brought *life and immortality to light*, and ſince *we have entrance with boldneſs into the holieſt of all by the blood of Jeſus, by that new and living way, which he hath conſecrated for us, through the veil, that is to ſay, his fleſh.* The apoſtle's inference is very juſt, *Heb.* x. 22. *Let us draw near with a true heart, in full aſſurance of faith. having our hearts ſprinkled from an evil conſcience, and our bodies waſhed with pure waters*; that is, let us come to God in the exerciſe of faith and unfeigned repentance: It is true, that reaſon itſelf and natural religion carries no ſmall light into futurity. When we conſider the moral perfections of God, from which we infer that ſome time or other he will make a diſtinction between the good and the bad, which is not done in the external adminiſtration of providence here, for as *Solomon* obſerves, *Eccleſ.* ix. 2.

All

SERM. IV. *All things come alike to all, there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked, to the good, and to the clean, and to the unclean, to him that ſacrificeth, and to him that ſacrificeth not; as is the good, ſo is the ſinner, and he that ſweareth as he that feareth an oath*; when, I ſay, we conſider this, we conclude very reaſonably, that there will be a great difference made hereafter in the condition of men, by the appointment of their great judge.

But, chriſtianity gives us ſtill a much clearer light into the other world. It repreſents a future judgment, and the awful important iſſues of it in the moſt affecting manner; that Jeſus Chriſt, as the viſible judge, will ſit on his throne, ſummon the whole human race to appear before him, and diſtribute to every one rewards and puniſhments, according to what they have done in the body, whether it be good or evil. By this powerful conſideration, God requires all men to repent: the hope of an abſolute and compleat juſtification, and the enjoyment of an eternal reſt, and of fulneſs of joy in God's preſence, if they fulfil the terms of his covenant; if amending their evil ways and breaking off their ſins, they patiently

patiently continue in well doing, is the ſtrongeſt inducement that can be propos'd to a reaſonable nature. And, on the contrary, *the fear of that judgment and fiery indignation wherewith God will conſume his adverſaries*, one would think ſufficient to awaken the attention of the moſt obdurate ſinners, and diſpoſe them to forſake their ſins. Not that ſuch fear is ſufficient of itſelf to produce true repentance, but at leaſt, it ſhews the extreme folly of impenitency; and as it is generally the firſt thing that takes hold of very corrupt and harden'd hearts, it may excite ſuch conſideration as ſhall end in an ingenuous converſion to God. SERM. IV.

I ſhall now make ſome practical reflections on all that has been ſaid, and the *firſt*, which I think a very important one, is, that we ſhould take care to avoid reſting in falſe appearances of repentance, and ſubſtituting any thing elſe in the room of that true repentance which the goſpel does indiſpenſably require. They are groſs errors of the Papiſts, and of a moſt dangerous tendency to place the power of forgiving ſins in the hands of frail and fallible men, and annex that forgiveneſs to faſtings, confeſſions, penances, or any thing of a like nature. Theſe things

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things are entirely different from repentance, and men are unhappily deceiv'd who truſt in them. When our Saviour gave commiſſion to his apoſtles, and eſtabliſh'd their authority in this manner, *John* xx. 23. *Whoſe ſoever ſins ye retain they are retained, and whoſe ſoever ſins ye remit, they are remitted unto them*; it is contrary to the ſtrain of the goſpel, and reaſon itſelf, to imagine, that he has inveſted a ſucceſſion of fallible mortals with a power of pardoning ſins, and eſpecially upon conditions different from thoſe which he has irrevocably fix'd by his laws. The plain meaning is, that having received the Holy Ghoſt as their guide, the apoſtles had commiſſion, by their doctrine, to declare the perpetual unalterable terms upon which ſinners might obtain the juſtification of life; and on the other hand, that kind of diſobedience which wou'd fix them under a ſentence of condemnation. But, indeed the miſtake of thoſe proteſtants is as pernicious, (and in ſome reſpects more criminal, becauſe it is gone into againſt better means of knowledge) who found their hopes of acceptance, and the remiſſion of ſins, on meerly external acts, on the public inſtrumental duties of religion, on confeſſions and prayers, and the ſacraments,

ſacraments, without amendment of life; this is nothing but hypocriſy, it is mocking God and deceiving our own ſouls. SERM. IV.

Secondly, It muſt be extreme folly and infinitely dangerous, to delay the neceſſary work of repentance till the approach of death. This general perſuaſion is fix'd in the minds of men, that repent they muſt ſome time or other, ſince without it their deſtruction is inevitable. But through the deceitfulneſs of ſin their hearts are ſo harden'd, and their affections ſo obſtinately cleave to their vitious courſes and worldly intereſts, they incline to put off that work, which however confeſſedly neceſſary, yet is diſagreeable, to a more convenient ſeaſon; and the moſt convenient they can pitch upon is, when they muſt leave this world, and the pleaſures of ſin can be no longer held.

A great many arguments might be inſiſted on, to ſhew the abſurdity of ſuch a conduct. Any one that conſiders the mutability of human affairs, the uncertainties to which they are liable, particularly the life of man; our own obſervation furniſhing a multitude of inſtances of men dying without any opportunity, or even poſſibility, of preparing for

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death; or having any deliberate thoughts about the iſſues of it: any, I ſay, who conſiders this, muſt ſee that it's imprudent even to madneſs, to put our ſalvation on ſuch a riſque as the deſign and expectation of repenting on a death-bed. And as wiſe providence, to guard againſt our poſtponing the work of our ſalvation, has placed the manner and circumſtancees of our dying wholly out of our view, and made them to us utterly uncertain, ſo the diſpenſation of grace and divine aids may be loſt, and the Spirit of God grieved by their tranſgreſſions, will at laſt ſtrive no more with ſinners, who are become *altogether fleſh*, incorrigibly corrupt, having by a cuſtom of doing evil harden'd themſelves into an utter inſenſibility: Does not experience ſhew, and the leaſt reflexion on the nature of habits, that the longer repentance is delay'd, the more difficult it becomes? And muſt not every one be ſenſible how inconſiſtent, and indeed diſingenuous it is, to commit ſin with an intention to be afterwards heartily ſorry for it, if there were no more in repentance than ſorrow for ſin?

But the conſideration to which my preſent ſubject particularly directs our thoughts, is, that

that repentance, as it has been in this diſcourſe explained, ſignifying an actual Reformation of life, breaking off our ſins, and bringing forth the fruits of righteouſneſs, in the approach of death, is impracticable: I have ſhewn you that according to the ſcriptural notion of it, it conſiſts in a thorough univerſal change of the heart and affections of the diſpoſitions and manner of life; at leaſt, newneſs of life is abſolutely neceſſary according to the goſpel declarations. But in the caſe ſuppos'd, what opportunity is there for all this? To be griev'd for our tranſgreſſions, to acknowledge them with ſhame, to change our inclinations and purpoſes, and declare, that if we were to live we would return to them no more, which is all the repentance dying men can exerciſe, is not to do what God indiſpenſably requires as the terms of our acceptance, but to ſubſtitute ſomething elſe in the place of it. Beſides, if ever ſo great ſtreſs was to be laid on theſe things, the ſincerity of them in dying men, is always liable to ſuſpicion. How little can be attained of that calmneſs and deliberation which is neceſſary to them, and how natural is it to fear that in the preſent circumſtances of diſtreſs and conſternation, ſeem-

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SERM. IV. ingly religious dispositions are only extorted by the immediate shocking apprehensions of death, and of a future punishment? We should not indeed take upon *us* to pronounce judgment against men, who having liv'd wickedly, do in the immediate views of death, exercise all the repentance which is then possible for them; no doubt it is the best they can do, and it's most reasonable to press them to it. But the scriptural declarations are not calculated for that case, and for aught I see, give very little ground of comfort. Their evident design is, to awaken sinners out of their Security, and urge them by the strongest motives, while yet there is space given to repent and to amend their doings, and that being the case of every one of us, what remains but that we apply it to ourselves, diligently *minding in our day the things that belong to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes.*

SER-

SERMON V.

PETER'S *denial of his Maſter, practically improved.*

Matth. xxvi. 74.

Then began he to curſe and to ſwear, ſaying, I know not the man, and immediately the cock crew.

THESE words relate an event in its kind one of the moſt remarkable we meet with in ſcripture; an eminent chriſtian, nay, an apoſtle of Chriſt, ſuddenly caught in a very heinous defection from his duty, even the denial of his Lord with curſing. From whence, if we conſider it ſeriouſly with all its circumſtances, many uſeful inſtructions to us will ariſe, which ſhall be the principal ſubject of this diſcourſe. But, in order to proceed the more diſtinctly, it will be neceſſary, *firſt*, to ſtate the fact. The Apoſtle *Peter*, whoſe character by the accounts which the goſpel hiſtory gives of

SERM. V. him, appears diſtinguiſhed among the diſciples by a warm and forward zeal in his religious profeſſion, tho' not always duely balanc'd with knowledge and deliberation; he was the firſt on many occaſions, to expreſs his affectionate reſpect to his maſter, and readineſs to undertake any ſervice which ſhould be enjoined him; he had the honour to make that excellent confeſſion concerning our Saviour, recorded *Matt.* xvi. 16. Whereupon he was declared to be the rock, upon which the chriſtian church is built; not excluſively, however, of the other Apoſtles, for the church is built *upon the foundation of the apoſtles and prophets*; that is, their doctrine: And to him were committed the keys of the kingdom of heaven: Not peculiarly neither, but he was the firſt, which is the full meaning of that promiſe, that opened the kingdom of God, or preach'd chriſtianity to the Gentiles; but ſee how little reaſon there is to glory in any external priviledges, and what fatal reverſes in their ſpiritual ſtate and affairs men are liable to, who poſſeſs the moſt eminent of them! *Peter*, ſoon after being thus honoured by his maſter, as we read in the ſame 16th of *Matt.* expreſſed himſelf ſo ignorantly, and incon-

inconsiderately, upon the design of our Saviour's coming, and the nature of his kingdom, as to dissuade him from undergoing the sufferings his father had appointed for him; thereby meriting to himself this severe rebuke, *get thee behind me, Satan, thou art an offence to me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.* This eminent Apostle, I say, was warn'd by his lord, not only in common with the other disciples, but himself personally, of the extraordinary trial he was to meet with on the occasion of his master's entering into that most dismal scene which concluded in his death. A trial so severe, that it produced the unhappy effect of our Saviour's disciples forsaking him in his greatest extremity; which was a grievous circumstance in his sufferings; foreseen indeed by himself, and foretold long before by one of the ancient prophets, for thus is expounded *Matt.* xxvi. 31. the prediction of *Zech.* xiii. 7. *Smite the shepherd and the sheep shall be scattered.* But, as *Peter* was more earnest in his profess'd resolution of adherence to his master in all events, ver. 33. of this chapter, *tho' all men should be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended*; and ver. 35. *tho' I*

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ſhould die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. So he had a ſpecial warning of his danger, nay he was expreſsly told of the great particular tranſgreſſion he would fall into, with all the moſt material circumſtances of it. Ver. 34. *Verily I ſay unto thee, that this night before the cock crow, (i. e.* in that watch of the night, which was commonly call'd by the Jews the cock crowing; from midnight to three in the morning, or before the finiſhing it, that is before three) *thou ſhalt deny me thrice.* And accordingly he was by providence permitted, to be in this ſignal inſtance a memorable an inſtructive example of human weakneſs. We muſt at the ſame time obſerve, that with Chriſt's foreſight of his frail ſervant's defection, there was mix'd a gracious care for his recovery, which was even intimated to him; for to the ſame event refer theſe words of our Lord, *Luke* xxii. 31, 32. *Simon, Simon, Satan hath ſought to have you, that he may ſift you as wheat; but I have pray'd for thee, that thy faith fail not,* (that thou may'ſt not altogether apoſtatize from my religion, but obtain mercy to repent, and return to thy duty:) *and when thou art converted, ſtrengthen*

ſtrengthen thy brethren. We need only add, in ſtating the fact, that *Peter*'s denial of his maſter was attended with high aggravations, not only by the premonitions given him, and his own contrary purpoſe declared with great vehemence, which have been already taken notice of; but by its being often repeated, three times, in a very ſhort ſpace. The occaſion does not ſeem to have been ſo ſhocking, but that the ſpirit of a man might have ſuſtain'd it, if he had not been thrown into a pannic, for ſcarcely could one in a calm ſtate of mind believe, that the accuſation of being Chriſt's diſciple, if it had been prov'd and even confeſs'd in judgment, could have expos'd him to death; which yet he had undertaken to endure, rather than deny his Lord: and, finally, the temptation, ſtill the farther it proceeded, grew the harder for him; and his ſin increas'd from a ſlight denial at the firſt, to a paſſionate abjuration of his Maſter; for he denied with curſing and ſwearing. SERM. V.

From the fact thus ſtated, as it plainly appears in, there ariſe very important inſtructions to us, which we may profitably conſider, concerning the fallibility and weakneſs of human nature; concerning the danger

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ger of ſelf-confidence; the inſpection of God's providence into the failures of his people, together with his fore-ſight of them; his ſuper-intending care of them, even during the progreſs of their temptations, and his over-ruling the iſſues of them for good. Firſt, I ſay, the fallibility and weakneſs of human nature. This is what experience abundantly teſtifies: all the ſins of mankind, and they are more than can be numbred, are proofs of it; nay, * *there is not a juſt man living upon the earth, that doth good, and ſinneth not.* Not that God has made us to ſin: he is not the author of moral evil; it is not the neceſſary effect of the powers wherewith he has endued us; on the contrary, he has furniſh'd our nature with defences againſt it, and with faculties which have an oppoſite tendency: † *He is not tempted with evil, neither does he tempt any man.* It is a voluntary perverſion and abuſe of our natural faculties, and a violation of that law, which he has written upon our hearts. But he has made us frail and fallible. Indeed it does not appear, that any order of created beings were made originally impeccable. As abſolute perfection of knowledge is above the capacity and condition of

* Eccleſ. vii. 20. † James i. 13.

finite

finite minds, there ſeems to be inſeparable from their original frame, a poſſibility of miſtakes which may lead them into moral defects. Beſides, every indigent being muſt have ſelfiſh affections, which may in ſome circumſtances be the ſources of error, overballancing the benevolent diſpoſitions in which moral perfection conſiſts. But not to inſiſt on this, of all orders of rational creatures, which we have any knowledge of, ſome have actually corrupted themſelves. The angels who were made pure, and in a happy ſtate, yet did not all continue in it: ſome of them kept not their firſt eſtate of innocence and integrity; but, being the firſt example of diſobedience, fell irrecoverably by their tranſgreſſion, and were expell'd from their own habitation, their native heaven, *into outer darkneſs, where they are reſerv'd under chains to the judgment of the great day.* And the ſcripture ſhews us that the firſt of mankind, tho' diſtinguiſh'd by the divine bounty with many gifts and peculiar privileges, whereby they were enabled to hold their integrity, and in a happy ſituation, far leſs liable to be tempted than their poſterity are, yet did not abide in the innocence,

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cence, the honour and felicity, wherein they were made, but ſuffered themſelves to be miſled by the inſidious arts and falſe repreſentations of a ſubtile and malicious enemy.

But, to confine ourſelves particularly to the preſent condition of human nature; no man, I think, wants to have it proved that we are all liable to failures. Where is the man, who does not, to the conviction of all that are near him, and narrowly obſerve his behaviour, carry the plain marks of moral infirmity about him? and yet they ſee but a ſmall part of his faults. The moſt uſeful diſcoveries of this kind, are thoſe which every one might make in himſelf by a careful attention, having within us the candle of the Lord, our own ſelf-conſcious ſpirits, which ſearch the inmoſt parts. We might there, in a multitude of inſtances, diſcern the riſe of ſin, the conceptions of luſt, as St. *James* calls it, or the lower ſenſitive part of our nature, comprehending our appetites and paſſions; its progreſs darkning the underſtanding, engroſſing the attention, thereby producing an inſenſibility to the moſt important things of religion, and our true rational happineſs: ſo that the exerciſe of our rational

rational and moral powers is defeated, and we betray'd into great and grievous offences: which, perhaps, upon a review, it is matter of aſtoniſhment to us how we came to be ſo ungrateful, ſo perverſe, ſo fooliſh, ſo thoughtleſs about our own true intereſt, and ſo inconſiſtent with our diſpoſitions and purpoſes at other times, as to fall into them. SERM. V.

It may perhaps affect our minds ſtill more, to conſider what failings, nay heinous treſpaſſes, have ſtain'd the lives of very eminent perſons, in whom virtue has been carried to the higheſt perfection that frail humanity is capable of. To ſee a man, not in a ſingle action only, but through the general tenor of his behaviour, diſplay heroic goodneſs, magnanimity, fortitude, patience, beneficence, in ſome inſtances of his conduct, fall vaſtly beneath himſelf, nay, into a ſhameful degree of the contrary vices; this is a ſurpriſing appearance; and yet the ſcripture hiſtory affords a variety of ſuch examples. Scarcely, indeed, is there recorded one illuſtrious character with high applauſe, that is not ſullied with ſome remarkable defect in that very virtue which obtain'd the greateſt encomium. The celebrated *Abraham*, who has the honour to be call'd the father of the faithful, and

SERM. V. and the friend of God, ſeems not to have acted ſuitably to his character, when, thro' fear, he denied his wife, thereby expoſing her and other innocent perſons to a ſnare, both in *Egypt* and at *Gerar*, where *Abimelech* reproved him ſeverely, as we read in the 20th chapter of *Geneſis*. *Moſes*, the meekeſt man in the whole earth, yet once ſpake unadviſedly, and his ſpirit was embittered, ſo that God in his diſpleaſure depriv'd him of the priviledge of entering into *Canaan*; and *Job*, whoſe exemplary patience is juſtly celebrated in every age, yet in the extremity of his long continuing trial, fell into the contrary diſtempers of mind to a degree, which was reproachful, and afterward the ſubject of grievous remorſe. A multitude of other inſtances there are, which the time would fail me to mention; but that in the text is very peculiar. A man ſo near to the holy Jeſus, a foundation on which he built his Church, and to whom he committed the keys of his kingdom, ſo reſolute in his adherence to him as to ſay, without his heart reproaching him for inſincerity, *tho' I ſhould die with thee I will not deny thee*; yet in that very night, after ſo recent a premonition, denies with oaths, that he ſo much as knew him.

him. What is man! *wherein is he to be accounted of?* What are even good men! how little to be depended on? man in his beſt eſtate is but vanity, in his beſt moral ſtate, or temper of mind in this world, but uncertain. How changeable are his purpoſes? they ſeem to be ſtrong, and he has mighty confidence in them; in his own fond imagination nothing is too hard for him; but anon his paſſions riſe violently agitated by temptations, preſently his underſtanding is darkned, pious and virtuous reſolutions are forgotten, and feeble as water, he yields to the firſt aſſault. If the ſhortneſs of the time, affording very little opportunity for calm reflection; the ſituation of the apoſtle ſurrounded with inveterate enemies, not one fellow diſciple near him, nor any perſon who might in the leaſt contribute to his aſſiſtance and ſupport, and the confuſion he was thrown into by his maſter's diſtreſs; if theſe circumſtances do in ſome meaſure alleviate his tranſgreſſion; for, certainly, the greater perturbation the mind is in, unhinging it, and ſtunning its powers ſo, that they are rendered uncapable of exerting themſelves regularly, the more pitiable is its condition, approaching to a diſtraction; and the leſs

meditated

SERM. V. meditated and cool any evil purpoſe is, the leſs heinous; yet theſe very circumſtances prove the point before us, the weakneſs of human nature: for they clearly ſhew, that man is obnoxious to ſuch infirmities and diſtempers of mind as render him inſufficient for acting the part which becomes him, and perſevering ſteadily in it. Diſtempers which, though they be partly natural, and ſo far compaſſionable; yet do they alſo participate of moral evil, and communicate it to the actions proceeding from them; which therefore are far from being altogether excuſable, as ſurely St. *Peter*'s denial of his maſter was not, whatever may be ſaid or imagin'd, in ſome degree to extenuate it. Let us now proceed

Secondly, To conſider one faulty occaſion of this good man's great offence, as it appears from the ſtate of the fact by the goſpel hiſtory, and it was *ſelf-confidence*, which he carried ſo far as in expreſs terms to contradict his Lord, when he told him ſo circumſtantially, *before the cock crow thou ſhalt deny me thrice*; which one would think, might have very ſenſibly affected his mind, and produced at leaſt a jealouſy of himſelf, if it was not peremptorily to be taken as a prediction

prediction of a future fact; but the answer SERM. was pronounced, rashly enough, in direct V. opposition, *tho' I should die with thee, yet I will not deny thee.* It is not at all to be doubted but *Peter* expressed the present real sentiments of his heart, he was far from intending to conceal a design then form'd to act a treacherous part: That was an hypocrisy which so good a man could not be capable of. But his fault was, speaking so positively, without due deliberation, without a becoming sense of his own frailty, and a just apprehension of his danger. He spoke the language of a sudden emotion, a fervor that was natural to him, and even a passion, rather than a calm, well weighed judgment, which is the true foundation of stable and lasting virtuous purposes. He did not consider cooly, as he ought to have done, the deceitfulness of sin, and the power of temptation, having never met with such a a trial before: But too presumptuously trusting to the present warmth of his affection, was sanguine enough to believe it would never fail him.

I shall only observe at present, that an attention to what experience obviously teaches, will tend to illustrate the point before us. Nothing is more certain, or better known, than

SERM. V. that paſſions are the ſprings of haſty reſolution, and of action purſuant to it, whilſt they retain their ſtrength: But they ſubſide; and then the contrary paſſions, in their turns prevailing, produce the quite contrary effects. *Peter* himſelf was an example of this; when the heat of zeal was predominant, he was ready to venture on the moſt hazardous attempts in defence of his maſter; that very evening he drew his ſword, and boldly attacked an armed company, who came to apprehend *Jeſus*, which he did raſhly enough too, and without waiting for orders; but ſoon that warmth abated, giving place to fear; and when this got the aſcendant in his mind, he diſcovered a cowardice unworthy of a man, not to ſpeak of a diſciple of Chriſt. 'Tis thus commonly obſerved in the ordinary courſe of men's worldly affairs, and their manner of conducting themſelves; not the moſt eager and paſſionate in forming and entering into deſigns, are the moſt to be depended on for perſevering; but rather the cool and deliberate, becauſe they having maturely conſidered what difficulties and diſappointments may happen, are the better prepared to meet them, and the leſs diſconcerted in the execution of

of their designs. It is still more so in the affairs of religion than any other. For passion has, or ought to have, less share in counsels of that sort: Especially it ought to be remembred, that our religious purposes above all others, are immediately under the divine protection, and the superior aids of divine grace are most necessary to our holding them steadily. He, therefore, who engages in any arduous service to God, without committing himself to his care and direction, without placing his principal confidence in the sufficiency of God's grace, and his power, which *is perfected in our weakness*; he that does so, I say, goes to war unarmed, and exposes himself to the hazard of a shameful defeat. It is here, especially, that we ought to trust in the Lord *with all our might*, and *he that trusteth in his own heart* altogether, is a fool, as *Solomon* * speaks. I do not mean by this, that good men, satisfied from themselves, and rejoicing in the testimony of conscience concerning their sincerity, should not have good hope of their persevering in it to the end; but *first*, that the judgment of the mind upon its present moral state, its tem-

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* Prov. xxviii. 26.

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per and reſolutions, ſhould be founded on careful inquiry, and very attentive conſideration. There's ſuch a ſelf-partiality, I may ſay, even natural to men, that wiſdom requires us not to rely wholly on the firſt hopeful appearances of good affections and purpoſes: But examine diligently, and reflect calmly that we be not deceived. *Secondly*, the reſolutions of good men, in particular circumſtanced caſes, that they will ſtand in ſuch a trial, which they are warned of, or overcome ſuch a temptation, are yet leſs to be depended on, than their purpoſes of perſevering integrity in the main: Becauſe the laſt is what we have greater encouragement to hope for from the promiſes of God, *who will perform his good work in them till the day of Chriſt, will ſtrengthen, ſtabliſh, and ſettle them, and keep them by his power thro' faith unto ſalvation*, if he ſees their diſpoſitions and the courſe of their lives habitually right with him: But they have no ſuch ſecurity againſt the prevalence of particular temptations. And, *laſtly*, great modeſty becomes us, with thankful acknowledgments of, and humble confidence in God's gracious interpoſal for our eſtabliſhment. See how St. *Paul* expreſſes himſelf, when

when he had the ſtrongeſt aſſurance of his perſevering even to the end of faith, *the ſalvation of the ſoul*; 2 Tim. i. 12. *I know whom I have believed, and I am perſwaded he is able to keep that which I have committed to him againſt that day:* Where it is plain, his hope chiefly reſted, not on his preſent ſincerity, and the firmneſs of his own reſolutions, but on him whom he had believed; and his perſwaſion of his being preſerved to the final happineſs of the great day, was founded on the ability, and the grace of that Saviour, to whom he had committed his ſoul in well doing. SERM. V.

Thirdly, The whole paſſage, whereof my text is a part, leads us to conſider the inſpection of God's providence into the failures of his ſervants, his foreſight of them, his ſuperintending care, even during the progreſs of their temptations, and his overruling the iſſues of them for good. Nothing does more obviouſly ſtrike our minds in reading the hiſtory, than the part which our Saviour had in it. He foreſaw *Peter*'s denying him. What can be more evident? he foretold it with all its circumſtances, and if this tranſgreſſion of *Peter*, of which himſelf was the adequate, complete, and

SERM. V. only guilty cauſe, was the object of divine preſcience, ſo are all others of the ſame kind indeed all the voluntary actions of moral agents: For no reaſon can poſſibly be aſſigned, why ſome ſhould, and not others. This is, I acknowledge, a ſubject of a very high nature, and difficult queſtions have been moved concerning it. As how it can conſiſt with the freedom of rational agents? and, again, how it conſiſts with the rectitude, and goodneſs of God, to forſee moral evil in his creatures, and not interpoſe for preventing it? I ſhall not enter, at this time, on the diſcuſſion of theſe points, but only obſerve, that the liberty of our actions, ſo far as is neceſſary to conſtitute their morality, is what we are conſcious of; which is the ſureſt kind of knowledge, and excludes all doubting: That preſcience does not change, nor at all influence the nature of things, particularly of human actions, any more than the bare knowledge of what is paſt or preſent. And, that, tho' the nature and manner of the divine foreknowledge is to us incomprehenſible, as the manner of God's exerting his other perfections alſo is, for example, his power in creating, yet that's no argument againſt the truth of the thing itſelf,

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ſelf, which is otherwiſe fully prov'd by ſufficient evidence.

But let us obſerve, that our bleſſed compaſſionate Saviour was not unmindful of his weak diſciple, in that low ſtate, to which he was to fall, and actually did fall, even by his own fault; but regarded him with tender pity: He took early precautions againſt the ruinous tendency of that fall, by making timely interceſſion for him: *I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not:* He gave early repeated warnings, that if the ſin could not be wholly prevented, a foundation might be laid for repentance, when it ſhould afterwards be brought into *Peter*'s remembrance. Our Lord alſo, in the extremity of his own diſtreſs, when he ſtood before a moſt unrighteous tribunal, where he was cruelly and inhumanly uſed, yet did not forget his guilty ſervant. One of the evangeliſts obſerves, that when the cock crew, the time foreſeen for *Peter*'s compleating his offence, *Jeſus looked* upon him; which is taken notice of as the occaſion of his going out and weeping bitterly; or ſorrowing after a godly ſort, which wrought repentance unto ſalvation, not to be repented of. And, *laſtly*, the ſequel ſhows, that the good ſhepherd recover-

SERM. V. ed his ſtraying ſheep from the error of his way, and reſtored him to that favour with himſelf in which he ſtood before; far from taking the forfeiture of privileges which he had made by his crime, he receives him, upon repentance, as if he had not ſinned, (as it was juſt now obſerved, he contributed by his gracious care and kind interpoſition, to bring him to repentance) and reinſtates him in his office without abating one circumſtance, one honourable diſtinction from the reſt of his brethren, which had ever been granted to him. After our Lord's reſurrection, when an angel attended at his grave to direct the diſciples who ſhould come to enquire for him, this heavenly meſſenger diſtinguiſhes *Peter*, in the report he makes to be communicated to the apoſtles; *tell*, ſays he, *to the women*, Mark xvi. 7. *his diſciples and* Peter, *that he goes before them into* Galilee. And we read *John* xxi. 15. that he received again with great ſolemnity the charge which had been given him before, to feed the ſheep and the lambs of Chriſt: Nay, care was taken by our Saviour, that *Peter* ſhould riſe with advantage from his fall, to greater uſefulneſs, by an eminent zeal which naturally accompanies ſincere repentance, for con-

confirming his fellow disciples: And so his master charges him, *when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.* SERM. V.

From what has been discoursed on this subject, we may make several useful practical reflections. In the first place, let us guard against abusing it to the worst of purposes, by thinking little of sin, and of yielding to temptations wherewith we may be assaulted. Since good men, indeed the very best, while in this imperfect state, are liable to be surprized, even into heinous transgression, that's a very good reason for our caution, lest we also be tempted and fall after the same evil example: Not at all for our thinking their offences the less criminal, and thereby being easily led into an imitation of them. On the contrary, a man's being otherwise good, and thro' the general course of his life and actions pious and virtuous, renders the single trespass, or the few he has been guilty of, the more sinful; because his obligations to the contrary are greatly increased by his goodness, by the experience he has had of the excellence and reality of religion, the power of its motives, the present advantages resulting from it, and by the repeated voluntary engagements he has

SERM. V. has brought himſelf under. This is a way of thinking and practical reaſoning, which ſcarcely can a ſincere chriſtian at any time be capable of it; it is ſo wretchedly diſingenuous, and, one would think, muſt proceed only from an habitually depraved heart, and loſt to all ſenſe of true piety. "I have "been thro' the general courſe of my con- "verſation innocent, and made it my ſtudy "to pleaſe God, I may, therefore for this "once, allow myſelf to tranſgreſs, and hope "he will not be greatly offended." Or, "other "good men have acted in this manner, and "I may take the liberty to follow the ex- "ample." Such thoughts, we may be aſſured, were far from St. *Peter*'s heart, as they are far from every religious perſon's, in the worſt ſtate of mind we can reaſonably ſuppoſe him in. And the moſt wilful ſins they commit at any time are to be attributed, rather to the preſent power of temptations, and paſſions ſtupifying their minds, and in a great degree ſuſpending the exerciſe of their reaſoning powers, than to ſuch deliberation, and meditated pretences for juſtifying themſelves. Let it be obſerved, that the caſe of the text, and others like it, recorded in ſcripture, were ſingle offences, not repeated; and

and therefore nothing can be drawn from them in the leaſt to countenance evil habits, frequently producing wicked actions; or affording hope to ſuch as indulge themſelves in them, which by the plaineſt and moſt expreſs declarations of the word of God, diſqualify men for his kingdom. SERM. V.

And ſtill leſs is there any encouragement given by the hiſtory before us, and others parallel to it, from the divine foreſight of men's offences, divine grace interpoſing to prevent their total apoſtacy, and providence over-ruling the iſſue for good; encouragement, I ſay, to make light of their wilful ſins, and go on in them with hope of impunity and acceptance. It is true, that our Saviour forewarn'd *Peter* of his fall, had a compaſſionate care of him in his weakneſs, took gracious methods for his recovery, and upon repentance reſtored him to favour, and to the privileges and exerciſe of his former office, perhaps with advantage both to himſelf and others; and it may be God deals ſo by others of his ſervants, which wonderfully manifeſts his tender mercy; but ſurely it is no reaſon, why we ſhould repeat our tranſgreſſions, and harden ourſelves in them.

This

SERM. V. This is the ſame abſurdity, which St. *Paul* mentions, *Rom.* vi. 1. as what ſome men imagin'd to be chargeable on the goſpel grace, and which he rejects with the utmoſt abhorrence. Having ſaid, in the cloſe of the preceeding chapter, that *where ſin abounded, grace did much more abound*; he adds, as a profane ſurmiſe which might ariſe in ſome impious minds, *ſhall we continue in ſin, that grace may abound?* and ſays, *God forbid.* Let it not be ſo. It's impoſſible ſuch a thought ſhould enter into a ſincere heart, or that the grace of God ſhould be ſo abuſed by any one who ſeriouſly conſiders the nature and deſign of it, which is, quite on the contrary, to reform men, and to deliver them from the power of ſin, as all the doctrines and inſtitutions of chriſtianity plainly ſhew.

The concluſion is, that the inſtance I have been explaining, and all the circumſtances of it fully proving human frailty, and the power and freedom of divine grace; that, I ſay, this inſtance is of a piece with the general intention of the grace that brings ſalvation and hath appeared unto us, inſtructing us, that *denying all ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, we ſhould live ſoberly, righteouſly and godly:* that

that we ſhould make it our ſtudy and principal care to eſchew evil, and cleave to that which is good; that we ſhould be workers together with God for our eſtabliſhment in virtue, and a reſolved adherence to him; to this end improving the invaluable advantages we have by the goſpel. SERM. V.

Secondly, It becomes chriſtians, and it is ſafe for them, always to have a modeſt ſenſe of their own infirmity, and therefore to place their hope in the power and goodneſs of God for the preſervation of their integrity, and their defence againſt temptations. St. *Paul* having, 1 *Cor.* x. given an abridgment of the hiſtory of the *Iſraelites* in the wilderneſs, of their ſins, and their puniſhments, applies it for an admonition to chriſtians, whoſe circumſtances are in many reſpects parallel, and ſays, ver. 12. *Wherefore let him that thinketh he ſtandeth take heed leſt he fall.* Nothing is more apt to betray them into a fall, than a fond conceit of their own ſufficiency, and reſting ſecurely in their own ſtrength. A much better foundation of confidence he mentions in the following words, ver. 13. *God is faithful who will not ſuffer you to be tempted above that you are able.*

'Tis

SERM. V. 'Tis true, men's conſciouſneſs of their own ſincerity naturally inſpires them with courage; *the righteous is bold as a lion:* but that is principally with reſpect to events, not in their own power; and the foundation of it is the ſupremacy, the wiſdom, the equity and goodneſs of divine providence, controuling the power of all creatures; with reſpect to their eſtabliſhment in virtue, and ſupport againſt temptations, it becomes chriſtians, well inſtructed concerning their own weakneſs, and the ſufficiency of divine grace, always to be jealous of themſelves, and to truſt in the Lord with all their might. And,

Laſtly, Conſider the exhortation of the apoſtle, *Gal.* vi. 1. *Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye that are ſpiritual reſtore ſuch a one to the ſpirit of meekneſs, conſidering thyſelf leſt thou alſo be tempted.* You ſee the beſt men are not out of danger; and though indignation againſt evil is a virtuous inſtinct planted in our nature, *charity which ſuffereth long, and is kind*, is as truly a virtuous principle, and the exerciſe of the latter is as much our duty, as the former; indeed

indeed a continuance in any ſinful courſe precludes the judgment of charity itſelf, in favour of the ſinner's preſent ſtate; but if he repent, we ſhould confirm our love to him, as if he had not offended. The beſt and moſt upright minds are the moſt compaſſionate towards others. SERM. V.

SER-

SERMON VI.

Of JUSTIFICATION by FAITH.

Rom. iv. 16.

Therefore it is of Faith, that it might be by grace, to the end the promiſe might be ſure to all the ſeed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that alſo which is of the faith of Abraham, *who is the father of us all.*

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EVERY one knows, that among profeſs'd chriſtians there has been, and continues to be, a great diverſity of opinions in ſome points of chriſtianity, which the ſeveral abettors of them judge to be of conſiderable importance. This muſt be acknowledged a pretty ſtrange appearance, conſidering that God gave his word to his people for a rule, not only of what every one ſhould believe for himſelf, but of their union and joint profeſſion. Not to enter into

into a large diſcuſſion of this ſubject, which my preſent deſign would not admit, one reaſon why chriſtians have run into ſuch a difference of ſentiments, and many of them into miſtakes, is, that they form their judgments, not by conſidering the general intention and the principal aim of the ſcriptures, but upon particular paſſages in ſome of the ſacred books, without attending to the connexion, and the occaſion, and deſign upon which they were written; which certainly is an unfair way of treating any writings whatſoever. And the errors ariſing from it in this caſe, are not to be charged on the want of perſpicuity in the ſcriptures, but the want of candor, or mature conſideration in thoſe who read them. SERM. VI.

There is no one article about which there have been greater diviſions and contradictory opinions, than that of juſtification, or the way and the terms of ſinners obtaining the forgiveneſs of ſins and acceptance with God; which, being the profeſs'd deſign of the goſpel, one would think, ſhould be above all things clearly taught in it; and indeed ſo it is. But here may be directly applied, what I hinted before as the cauſe that ſome have fallen into miſtakes. There aroſe vio-

SERM. VI.

lent controverſies between the Jews and the Gentiles, who embrac'd the chriſtian religion, about the neceſſity of obſerving the Moſaical law and inſtitutions, which the former zealouſly contended for. To decide this debate, and to ſhow the abſurdity of the Judaizing ſcheme, St. *Paul* wrote his epiſtles to the *Romans* and *Galatians*, containing ſeveral paſſages concerning juſtification by grace and faith, as in oppoſition to the law, and to works which ſome entirely found their opinions upon, without conſidering the occaſion and the ſcope which are the true key of them.

Now, if we carefully attend to the doctrines of our Saviour delivered in the four goſpels, which, as it is reaſonable to believe it ſhould be, being given for a ſtandard to chriſtians in every age, is exceeding plain; if, I ſay, we carefully attend to it, there will be no difficulty in forming an idea of the conditions of obtaining the pardon of ſin and acceptance with God, which it contains. Our bleſſed lord bringing a new revelation from heaven into a degenerate, ignorant, and corrupt world, it was neceſſary firſt of all, that his character ſhould be eſtabliſh'd, as a divine meſſenger, or the *Meſſias*; who, upon the credit of ancient prophecies, was expected

expected in *Judea*, where he began his mi- SERM. niſtry. For this end he worked many il- VI. luſtrious miracles, the moſt proper and effectual way for engaging the attention of diſaffected and prejudic'd men to his doctrine, and procuring it a fair hearing. The firſt condition, then, of obtaining any benefit by the goſpel, muſt be, what the bleſſed author declares, *believing it*, or *believing in him*. Next, he requires *repentance*, or that men convinc'd of their former ſins, of the evil of them, and the miſeries to which they are thereby rendered obnoxious, ſhould break them off with abhorrence and indignation, and return to a better mind and to a better courſe of life, bringing forth fruits meet for amendment. Theſe are the true original terms of chriſtianity, fix'd by our Lord Jeſus Chriſt; who, when he came preaching the goſpel of the kingdom of God, ſaid, (that is, this was the ſubſtance of his preaching,) *the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye and believe the goſpel*, Mark. i. 14, 15.

But, when men became his profeſs'd ſubjects, embrac'd his religion, and entered into the kingdom of God, upon theſe terms, or into the chriſtian ſtate; the general

SERM. VI. laws, or rules of their obedience, were declared by him in his other diſcourſes; particularly in his ſermon on the mount, and moſt clearly aſſertain'd by the example of his own life: and they appear to be no other than the moral law, the eternal and invariable law of nature, abridg'd in thoſe moral, and perpetually binding precepts, which *Moſes* gave to the *Iſraelites*, containing that love, confidence, ſubmiſſion, and obedience we owe to the deity; and the mutual offices of righteouſneſs and charity we are bound to perform to one another. To this end the precepts of the law are vindicated from the defective and corrupt interpretations of the Jewiſh doctors, and a more ſtrict purity and virtue enjoin'd by Jeſus Chriſt, than what was practis'd, or ſo much as underſtood by them. He expreſsly declares to his hearers * *except your righteouſneſs ſhall exceed the righteouſneſs of the Scribes and Phariſees, ye ſhall in no caſe enter into the kingdom of heaven*; and all along, he uniformly purſues the ſame deſign throughout the whole courſe of his teaching; conſtantly requiring of all his diſciples, ſincere holineſs and conformity to the will of

* Matt. v. 20.

God,

God, as indispensably necessary to their obtaining his favour, and the reward of eternal life. He describes the future judgment with great clearness and solemnity; and assures us, that sentences will then be pronounced according to our works: the righteous, that is, as he explains it, those who have abounded in the fruits of charity and beneficence, shall inherit the kingdom prepared for them before the foundations of the world; but the wicked shall be adjudg'd to everlasting punishment. SERM. VI.

If this be a true account of our Saviour's doctrine in the gospels, as I think it will plainly appear to every one who reads them attentively to be, there can be no doubt concerning the terms of our acceptance with God, which he has fix'd. The conditions of our becoming the disciples of Christ are faith and repentance; to which, if we be sincere, the forgiveness of all our past sins is annexed; and the condition of our title to the final happiness Christ has promis'd to his disciples, is a persevering stedfastness in obeying the immutable moral laws of God; or in practising the virtues of sobriety, godliness, justice and mercy.

SERM. VI. But, as I obſerved before, a controverſy ariſing among chriſtians, in the very infancy of the chriſtian ſtate, about the neceſſity of obſerving the Jewiſh law, occaſion'd by the high opinion which the Jews had of their peculiar and diſtinguiſhing privileges, and the excellence and perpetuity of the Moſaic inſtitutions; the apoſtle *Paul*, to whom the miniſtry of the uncircumciſion, or preaching chriſtianity to the Gentiles, was eſpecially committed, enters into this debate; and to determine it rightly, ſo, as according to his own expreſſion, *the truth of the goſpel might continue in the church*, he wrote ſeveral of his epiſtles. It is very evident, that he decides againſt the pretences of the Jews, and ſtrenuouſly aſſerts the ſufficiency of the goſpel itſelf, without the addition of the law, which he pronounces unprofitable; earneſtly exhorting chriſtians to ſtand faſt in the liberty, wherewith Chriſt had made them free, and not ſuffer themſelves to be again entangled in a yoke of bondage. To this purpoſe he expreſſes himſelf in ſuch terms, as tend to magnify the goſpel, and ſhow the neceſſity and uſefulneſs of it; and the inſufficiency of the law to the great ends of religion. I ſhall in this diſcourſe endea-

vour to explain his doctrine of juſtification by grace, without works, and by faith, as in oppoſition to the law; which two appear from the text to have a neceſſary connexion. *Therefore it is of faith that it might be by grace, to the end the promiſe might be ſure to all the ſeed, not to that only which is of the law, but to that alſo which is of the faith of* Abraham. SERM. VI.

In the firſt place, let us conſider the meaning of this apoſtle's doctrine of juſtification by grace without works. That he teaches this is plain to any one who reads his epiſtles, *Rom.* iii. 24. having largely prov'd, that all men had ſinned and were corrupt, both Jews and Gentiles; that all had fallen ſhort of the glory of God, and were concluded under wrath; he ſays, they are juſtified *freely by grace, thro' the redemption that is in Chriſt Jeſus.* And in the 11th chapter, having diſcourſed of the rejection of the Jews, that is, the body of the nation for their diſobedience to the goſpel, he ſays, that as formerly, in the days of *Elias*, when there was a general defection of the Iſraelites to idolatry, God reſerved to himſelf ſeven thouſand who did not bow the knee to the image of *Baal*; ſo

SERM. VI. at that time, when the groſs of the nation were ripening themſelves for deſtruction by their obſtinate unbelief and impenitency, there was a remnant, to whom the peculiar privileges of God's people were appropriated: And they are characterized by the *election of grace*, as in oppoſition to works: For it is ſaid, ver. 6. *if by grace, then it is no more of works: Otherwiſe grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: Otherwiſe work is no more work.* The meaning ſeems to be plainly this. There are but two ways by which men can be rendered acceptable to God; either by an exact fulfilling of his law, whereby they are intitled to the reward as a debt, which was the proud claim of the Jews; or by the free gift of pardon upon ſincere repentance and amendment, which is the gracious tenor of the chriſtian covenant. Between thoſe two, men were at that time divided in their hopes, and the methods they propoſed for obtaining the favour of God; and they were utterly inconſiſtent: So that when ſome endeavoured to compound them, by joining with the faith of Chriſt and the obedience of the Goſpel, the neceſſary obſervance of the ceremonial law, the

the apoſtle pronounces ſuch an attempt al- SERM. together vain, and declares in effect, that VI. we muſt hold to the one and reject the other. For he ſays, *Gal.* v. 4. according to this ſcheme, *Chriſt is become of no effect to you: Whoſoever of you are juſtified by the law, ye are fallen from grace.*

This notion of grace, ſo much inſiſted on in the writings of St. *Paul*, is intended to ſhow the obligations we are under to the mercy of God, in forgiving our ſins, and accepting us: It cuts off all pretences to merit, and excludes boaſting. *Rom.* iii. 27. *Where is boaſting then? it is excluded. By what law? of works? nay; but by the law of faith.* But we are not to underſtand all this, as if the goſpel were a mere unconditionate declaration of pardon and offer of ſalvation: On the contrary, it eſtabliſhes the neceſſary and perpetual obligation of the moral law, and is deſigned to reſcue men from the dominion of ſin: As the apoſtle ſhows, *Rom.* vi. 14. *Sin ſhall not have dominion over you: For ye are not under the law, but under grace.* At the ſame time, he teaches, that it is the groſſeſt abuſe of the goſpel grace to imagine, that becauſe we are under it, we may take a liberty to ſin;

SERM. VI. ſin: For, as the Jews by circumciſion were bound to the obſervance of the whole law, which required a perfect unſinning conformity to it, as the condition of acceptance, according to the tenor of that covenant, *do this and live*; but that law, giving *the knowledge of ſin*, could neither deliver men from the power, nor the puniſhment of it: So, by being initiated into chriſtianity, we become bound to obedience, in the merciful ſenſe, which the goſpel indiſpenſably requires, and accepts: That is, to ſincerity, not ſinleſs perfection. But if we ſin wilfully, and obſtinately, under grace, or under the chriſtian profeſſion; ſo far from being thoroughly juſtified, we are rendered obnoxious to inevitable condemnation: For ſays the apoſtle at the 23d ver. *the wages of ſin is death.*

Secondly, let us conſider the meaning of juſtification by faith without the law. That it is the doctrine of St. *Paul* cannot be doubted. It is the reſult of a long diſcourſe on the general depravity of men, rendering them liable to the wrath of God; and the divine mercy in ſetting forth Chriſt to be a propitiation for ſin, *Rom.* iii. 28. *Therefore we*

we conclude that a man is justified by faith without deeds of the law; which doctrine he says, at the 31st ver. of the same chapter, does not *make void the law, but establish it* rather. It does not derogate from the honour and obligation of the moral immutable precepts, which are taken into the christian scheme, as essential; tho' the ceremonial institutions are declared unnecessary, and unprofitable to justification. It is almost needless to mention particular passages from this apostle; his epistles abound with so many, which every reader must observe. What expressions can be more strong and full than those in *Gal.* ii. 15, 16. shewing that not only the Gentiles, but the Jews themselves, with all their great privileges, must obtain forgiveness and the favour of God, in this way only? *We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles: Knowing that a man is justified, not by the deeds of the law, but by the faith of Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: For by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.* SERM. VI.

To understand this we may observe, that christianity being a revelation from heaven, that

SERM. VI. that it may have any good effect upon us, we muſt believe it. And accordingly it is obvious that faith is what the goſpel requires as a firſt and fundamental duty: That we ſhould believe in God, and believe in our Lord Jeſus Chriſt. Whereas by the religion of the Jews, eſpecially in their latter days, and of thoſe who endeavoured to blend Judaiſm with chriſtianity, the great ſtreſs was laid on a ſcrupulous and exact obſervance of the ceremonial appointments: Therefore the goſpel is called by St. *Paul*, *the faith*, and the other *the law*. Thus in the firſt to the *Rom.* and 5th ver. he declares the end of the apoſtleſhip which he received from Chriſt, that it was for *obedience to the faith*. What can the meaning of that expreſſion be, but obedience to the law of Chriſt, or the goſpel, which God publiſhed by him to the gentile world? as it is ſaid, *Acts* vi. 7. *that a great number of the prieſts were obedient to the faith*. And in the third of the *Gal.* and 2d ver. *this only would I learn of you, received ye the ſpirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?* and ver. 5 *he that miniſtreth the ſpirit, and worketh miracles among you, doth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?*

Where

Where it is plain that *faith* ſignifies the chriſtian religion. It is to this therefore that the apoſtle attributes ſuch efficacy to the juſtification of men. SERM. VI.

But it by no means follows, that St. *Paul*'s intention is to attribute our acceptance with God to any peculiar virtue in faith, as ſeparated from thoſe works, and obedience, which are the genuine fruits of it. The faith, by which he ſays we are juſtified, is that which worketh by love, which produces a ſincere love to God and men, with the proper expreſſions of it, in the practice of true piety and virtue. Beſides, we find him as much as any of the ſacred writers, preſſing ſtrict holineſs and conformity to the will of God, and laying as great a ſtreſs upon it. The four laſt chapters of his epiſtle to the *Romans*, are wholly taken up in recommending the virtues of private and ſocial chriſtian life: And many exhortations of the ſame kind are to be met with in his epiſtles to the *Galatians*. Indeed, if we conſider chriſtianity as a divine law enforced with proper ſanctions; and it is in this light the apoſtles and evangeliſts always ſet it; they repreſent it as the grace of God, which hath appeared unto men bringing ſalvation, but

SERM. VI. but it does not terminate wholly in their deliverance from puniſhment, nor is the deſign anſwered on their part by bare believing, for it teaches us, *that denying all ungodlineſs, and worldly luſts, we ſhould live ſoberly, righteouſly and godly:* And this as the only foundation, upon which we can *look for the bleſſed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour* Jeſus Chriſt: No man can read the New Teſtament with any degree of attention, without being convinced that its principal ſcope is, to teach and urge men to goodneſs, righteouſneſs, temperance, and patience, by the ſtrongeſt motives, and particularly by the hope of acquittal in the day of judgment, and of obtaining eternal life; if, I ſay, we conſider it in this light, there can remain no doubt but that, tho' by the works of the law, as ſet againſt faith, a man cannot be juſtified, yet that, the works and obedience of which faith is the great animating principle, are, in conjunction with it, the condition of our acceptance. All this is farther confirmed by the example of *Abraham*, and the method of his juſtification, which St. *Paul* repreſents as a precedent to all after ages, and argues from it. He aſſerts that *Abraham* was accounted righteous

righteous before God, while circumciſion was not yet inſtituted, nor any of the legal ceremonies. In this chapter he aſks, *what ſhall we ſay then, that* Abraham *our father, as pertaining to the fleſh, hath found? for if* Abraham *were juſtified by works, he hath whereof to glory, but not before God:* That is, there is no ſuch thing as his having any thing whereof to glory before God. For he adds, *what ſaith the ſcripture?* Abraham *believed God, and it was counted to him for righteouſneſs. Now, to him that worketh, is the reward reckoned not of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him who juſtifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted to him for righteouſneſs.* Thus the religion of *Abraham* was ſufficient; a religion without ceremonies, which afterwards were in ſo high eſteem, and accounted ſo neceſſary among the Jews; a principle of faith, or of confidence in the goodneſs, and the promiſe of God, producing intire reſignation to his providence, and ſincere obedience to his commandments. It was ſo before the giving of the law: Why not after its abolition? Chriſtianity is the religion of *Abraham* reſtor'd: A plain, unceremonious form of divine ſervice, animated by that faith, *which*

SERM. VI.

ſees

SERM. VI. *ſees him who is inviſible, is the ſubſtance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not ſeen, and worketh by love.*

Farther, St. *Paul* argues not from the example of *Abraham* only, but from the tenor of the declarations which were made to him. The promiſe was given him, that he ſhould be *the heir of the world, the father of many nations, and have a numerous ſeed:* Which the apoſtle interprets, not of his natural offspring, tho' they were as *the ſtars of Heaven for multitude*, for theſe were not all heirs of the promiſe in the ſpiritual ſenſe: But ſo as to extend to all who ſhould walk in his ſteps; that is, imitate his faith, and his virtue. Now the promiſe was made to him while he was yet uncircumciſed, and therefore as the text ſays, *is ſure to all the ſeed: Not to that only which is of the law, but to that alſo, which is of the faith of* Abraham, *who is the father of us all.* And more fully at the 10th ver. *How was it (righteouſneſs) then reckoned? When he was in circumciſion, or in uncircumciſion? not in circumciſion, but in uncircumciſion. And he received the ſign of circumciſion, a ſeal of the righteouſneſs of the faith, which he had being yet uncircumciſed: That he might be*

the

the father of all them that believe, though they be uncircumciſed; that righteouſneſs might be imputed to them alſo. From all which it is apparent, what law it is the apoſtle intends to exclude from a ſhare in our juſtification: It is that law, which was added becauſe of tranſgreſſion, denouncing wrath for every diſobedience, and binding men over to puniſhment for the leaſt failure, which therefore could not give life. And the Jews miſtook its nature and deſign, if they expected life by it: For it was intended only as a ſchoolmaſter, to lead them, by its ſevere diſcipline, to Chriſt the promiſed ſeed, who declared righteouſneſs by faith, or upon the more favourable and gracious terms of a ſincere, tho' imperfect obedience to the goſpel, This, I ſay, is the law which the apoſtle excludes from a ſhare in our juſtification: Not the eternal, unchangeable law of ſobriety, righteouſneſs, godlineſs, and charity, which chriſtianity, or the grace that brings ſalvation, teaches, and in the ſtrongeſt manner enforces, making our obedience to it indiſpenſably neceſſary to our obtaining the reward it promiſes. SERM. VI.

Thus the ſeeming contradiction between the apoſtles St. *Paul* and St. *James* is very

SERM. VI. eaſily reconciled. The one, as I have already ſhewed, teaches, that we are juſtified by grace and by faith without works: The other directly aſſerts, that faith without works cannot juſtify. They both prove their ſeemingly contrary aſſertions by the example of *Abraham*. For as St. *Paul* expreſsly ſays, his *faith without works was imputed to him for righteouſneſs*; and refers to the words of ſcripture, *Gen.* xv. 6. Abraham *believed and it was counted to him for righteouſneſs*. St. *James* as plainly ſays, *was not* Abraham *our father juſtified by works when he offered his ſon* Iſaac *upon the altar?* And ſupports his doctrine by the ſame paſſage in *Geneſis:* For, ſays he, and the ſcripture was fulfilled which ſaith, *Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteouſneſs.* But the works which theſe two apoſtles ſpeak of are intirely different. St. *Paul* treats of the works of the law, of circumciſion, and ſacrifices, and waſhing, and tythes: But St. *James* of judgment, mercy and faith, and the love of God; of virtue and charity out of *a pure heart*, and *a good conſcience*, and *faith unfeigned.* Theſe laſt, as he ſpeaks in the caſe of *Abraham*, work *together with faith*, *and*

and by them faith is made perfect. That eminent patriarch did not obtain righteouſneſs, and that high title of the friend of God, by his diligence and zeal in ritual obſervances; but by a very ſubſtantial proof of his confidence in God, and reſignation to his will, which carried faith to its higheſt perfection. In like manner, altho' the works of the moſaic inſtitution, or the Jewiſh religion, are now laid aſide; and if we ſeek to be juſtified by them, we are fallen from grace; it does not follow, that the works of the chriſtian religion, and obedience to the commands of Chriſt, are unneceſſary likewiſe; for by them it is that faith is made perfect, practical chriſtianity receives its finiſh'd form, and they are what the goſpel indiſpenſably requires to our ſalvation. SERM. VI.

The ſum is this; when the religion of nature, which eſſentially conſiſts in an imitation of God's moral perfections, when this was ſo obſcured in the degenerate ſtate of human nature, that the end generally could not be obtained by it, that is, bringing men to the regular practice of virtue, and to the happineſs they were originally deſign'd for; it pleaſed God to favour ſome

SERM. VI. of mankind with a poſitive revelation of his will. The patriarchal form of religion was firſt inſtituted, and then the *Moſaical*, in which with a mixture of many ceremonies, ſuitable to the then ſtate of things, and the genius of the people to whom it was given, there are many excellent inſtructions in the chief points of duty: but, afterwards this alſo proving inſufficient, for the apoſtle ſhews, that *both Jews and Gentiles ſinned, and fell ſhort of the glory of God*, and therefore were equally *concluded under wrath*; it pleaſed God, by his ſon Jeſus Chriſt, to publiſh the law of faith, and *declare his righteouſneſs for the remiſſion of ſins*; by which all, who ſubmit to it, whether formerly under the Jewiſh diſpenſation, or heatheniſh darkneſs and ſuperſtition, ſhould be alike entitled to the favour of God.

By this new conſtitution the former was diſannulled, becauſe of the weakneſs and unprofitableneſs thereof. But the eſſence of religion remains the ſame and unalterable, however the outward forms of it may vary. The ſubſtance of all true religion is obedience to the moral and eternal law of God; that is, to imitate him in juſtice, holineſs, and mercy. The ceremonies which *Moſes* inſtituted

instituted were of no significancy, farther than as they served to promote this end, as appears by many express declarations of the Old Testament itself. The Prophets often warn the Israelites not to trust in their oblations, and their ritual observances; *for God loved mercy more than sacrifice*; and the *knowledge of him, and obedience to his moral law, more than all their burnt-offerings*; *that he took no pleasure in the blood of bulls and goats*; *nay thousands of rams, and ten thousand rivers of oyl, could not expiate the least of their transgressions.* And the only way to please him was, *to cease to do evil, and learn to do well*; *to seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, and plead for the widow:* in fine, *to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God.* Thus the apostle teaches us to understand the true spirit of the Jewish religion, and to distinguish between a nominal Jew, who is one outwardly, and him who is sincere, and comes up to the real design of his profession. *Rom.* ii. 28, 29. *He is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit and not* SERM. VI.

SERM. VI. *in the letter, whoſe praiſe is not of men but of God.* The caſe is the ſame in chriſtianity, which is perverted in the worſt manner, if we take encouragement from it to ſin. The apoſtle having fully eſtabliſh'd his doctrine of grace, and ſaid, *that it did much more abound where ſin had abounded*; aſks this queſtion, *what ſhall we ſay then, Rom.* vi. 1. *ſhall we continue in ſin that grace may abound?* Which inference he rejects with the utmoſt abhorrence. *God forbid!* and goes on to ſhew, that it is quite contrary to the nature and deſign of the chriſtian ſtate, whereby we are *dead to ſin*, and therefore ought not to live any longer therein. Elſewhere he ſpeaks of it as a moſt ſhocking abſurdity, to make Chriſt *the miniſter of ſin*; which is really the meaning of repreſenting the goſpel, as if it made void the law, or in any reſpect weaken'd the obligation which is upon chriſtians to keep its precepts.

Upon the whole; one cannot imagine a greater inconſiſtency, than for a chriſtian to tranſact with God and claim to his favour, upon the foot of external obſervances, or of faith, while he allows himſelf in any vicious courſe, and neglects judgment, mercy, and the

the love of God. This is to transfer Judaiſm, not the true religion taught by the Prophets to the Iſraelites, but the perverſe notions and ſpirit, which prevail'd among them in their worſt and moſt degenerate times, into chriſtianity; ſo much the more inexcuſable, as the diſpenſation we are under, does in compariſon with the former, bear the character of *ſpirit and truth*. Who can think that baptiſm, the Lord's ſupper, prayer, not to ſpeak of uſages merely of human invention, will be any more available, without the *new creature* and *faith working by love*, than circumciſion, ſacrifices, and the diſtinction of meats and days? SERM. VI.

It is altogether as unreaſonable to expect acceptance by faith without works, which is really dead. The law of faith indeed excludes boaſting; but not diligence in good works. Let *us therefore give all diligence to make our calling and election ſure*, 2 *Pet.* i. 10. and the way is mark'd out, ver. 5, 6, 7. of the ſame chapter; and let us remember the doctrine of the apoſtle *John*, 1 epiſt. iii. 7. *Little children let no man deceive you, he that doth righteouſneſs is righteous, even as he is righteous.*

SERMON VII.

Of a Conſcience void of Offence.

Acts xxiv. 16.

And herein do I exerciſe myſelf to have always a conſcience void of offence towards God and towards men.

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THESE words are a part of St *Paul*'s apology for himſelf before *Felix* the Roman governor. He was vehemently accuſed by the Jews as an heretick, a mover of ſedition, and guilty of profaning the temple of *Jeruſalem*. But, the particular crime objected to him, and which principally ſtir'd up their rage, was his being a ring-leader of the ſect of the *Nazarenes*; ſo they called the chriſtians. In his defence he expreſsly denies the facts charg'd upon him; ſuch as his having mov'd ſedition in *Jeruſalem*, and profan'd the temple: But, for what they called hereſy, he frankly acknowledged it, at the ſame time inſiſting, that it was innocent both with reſpect to religion

ligion and civil ſociety. For as to religion, he agreed with the Jews in worſhipping the God of his and their fathers, and receiving without exception what they alſo profeſs'd to be the rule of their faith, namely, all that is written in the law of *Moſes* and the prophets: Particularly he hoped in God, which the Phariſees themſelves, his fierce accuſers, alſo allowed, for a future reſurrection of the dead, as that which ſhall complete the felicity of good men. What harm could poſſibly accrue to the intereſt and profeſſion of true religion, where ſuch principles were uniformly maintained? Eſpecially if we add, what the apoſtle aſſerts to have been the genuine effect of them upon his mind, and his converſation; *and herein do I exerciſe myſelf to have always a conſcience void of offence towards God and towards men.* This is the true teſt, by which our pretended zeal for religion, and belief of its doctrines, are to be tried and determined. Without it zeal is but a human, indeed a corrupt paſſion: And faith, or profeſſion, be it ever ſo ſound, no better than infidelity. But, he that ſincerely exerciſes himſelf herein, *to have always a conſcience void of offence,* in effect the ſame, *that feareth God* SERM. VII.

SERM. VII. *God and worketh righteouſneſs,* will be accepted with God as his approved ſervant; and fulfils all the purpoſes of religion: At the ſame time he ought to be acknowledged a good member of ſociety, and is not juſtly obnoxious to civil government. The caſe being ſo, it is of great importance to underſtand, and ſtill of greater importance to imitate the example of the apoſtle. In order to which I will endeavour in the following diſcourſe, 1ſt, To ſhow what it is to have a conſcience void of offence towards God and towards men; 2dly, I will conſider this as the proper ſubject of our conſtant attention and exerciſe; 3dly, The neceſſity and reaſonableneſs of it.

Firſt, I am to ſhew what it is to have a conſcience void of offence towards God and towards men. I ſuppoſe every one of us to know what conſcience is, ſo far as is neceſſary to the preſent purpoſe. We all know that our minds, conſcious of their own ſentiments, affections, diſpoſitions and voluntary actions, have a power of reflecting on themſelves, and what paſſes in them; nay, by a multitude of occaſions are unavoidably led to it. And nothing upon a review occurs

curs of greater moment, and yet more ob- SERM.
viouſly, than our own moral characters, our VII.
tempers, our works; which are accompa-
nied with the higheſt pleaſure in our appro-
bation, or the moſt painful ſelf-reproach.
It is true the principle of ſelf-love deeply
rooted in our nature, makes us always ſen-
ſible to our own intereſts; ſo that a conſci-
ouſneſs of having wiſely promoted it, gives
pleaſure. As on the other hand, it is
galling to conſider, that we have been want-
ing to ourſelves, and imprudently taken the
meaſures which tend to obſtruct our own
happineſs. But, moral conſcience is of a
peculiar kind; and, abſtracting from the
natural good and evil, or pleaſure and pain
to ourſelves, which muſt follow, the firſt and
ſimpleſt reflection on our having done right
or wrong, immediately gives joy or remorſe.
Perhaps there is not a rational being, to whom
ſome characters and works do not appear at
firſt ſight to have an inſeparable turpitude;
and a conſciouſneſs of them is horridly offen-
ſive: As the oppoſite diſpoſitions and works
are neceſſarily judged amiable.

The painful ſenſe of evil done is accom-
panied with fear, becauſe of apprehended
ill deſerving, which the mind is imme-
diately

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diately ſtruck with when it reflects on its own wickedneſs; as, on the contrary, there ariſes an inward ſecurity and confidence from a conſciouſneſs of our own innocence and integrity. Eſpecially the mind, which is firmly perſuaded concerning God the ſupreme, the infinitely wiſe, the perfectly righteous, and good governor of the world, muſt feel in the moſt affecting manner the accuſations, and the acquittals of conſcience, which pronounces its judgments with an eye to his ſuperior tribunal, and with an expectation of their being confirm'd by him; as the work of the divine law is written on every human heart, we naturally have preſaging thoughts of the account which we muſt give of our own actions, and that *every work ſhall be brought into judgment, and every ſecret thing, whether it be good or evil.*

It is to be obſerved, that by the conſtitution of the human mind, which comprehends a variety of principles or ſprings of action; conſcience is properly the ſuperior controuling faculty, becauſe the power of approving or condemning belongs to it. Every affection, every appetite, is a diſtinct and direct ſpring of action; but as there is

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a regular œconomy, and one common end intended in the whole frame, and an enjoyment ſuitable to ſuch a being, reſulting from the regular uſe of all its parts or exerciſe of all its powers, there muſt for this purpoſe be a conſiſtency or harmony of the whole, or the creature muſt be eaſy in itſelf, which it cannot poſſibly be, unleſs the ſelf-reflecting power, or conſcience be ſatisfied. Hence ariſes a proper obligation, the ſovereignty of conſcience ought to be acknowledged, and its dictates obey'd; for he that hearkens to its voice, and complies with it, poſſeſſes an inward tranquillity; he that acts in oppoſition to it is by the very frame of his nature uneaſy and diſcontented in himſelf. Still it is to be remember'd, as was hinted before, that to minds poſſeſs'd with the ſerious belief and fear of the deity, this has a reference to his ſuperior tribunal, where we cannot help expecting that the ſentence of our ſelf-reflecting power will be affirm'd; for if we conſider God as the voluntary deſigning author of our conſtitution, 'tis impoſſible, I think, for a reaſonable attentive perſon to doubt but he intended we ſhould act according to its direction; conſequently, that our obeying the voice of conſcience pleaſes,

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pleaſes, the contrary diſpleaſes him. If *our hearts condemn us*, that is, if conſcience diſapprove our diſpoſitions and the habitual courſe of our actions, or any deliberate deſigned work, we have then reaſon to dread the vengeance of him *who is greater than our hearts and knoweth all things:* * *if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.*

It follows, that to all purpoſes of virtue and religion, to ſatisfy the obligations of our nature and to pleaſe God, which is the great aim of piety, the ſhort and comprehenſive rule of conduct is always to act according to conſcience.

But, the queſtion is concerning the certainty of this rule; will it bear us out in every caſe? Is conſcience infallible? I anſwer it is not, nor did God intend we ſhould have an infallible direction in this imperfect ſtate. We are here in an infancy of being, training up to a more perfect condition, in the mean time liable to ſome errors in judgment, and in practice purſuant to them: but the direction propoſed, if it be rightly underſtood and

* 1 John iii. 20, 21.

impartially

impartially follow'd, is ſafe and abſolutely the beſt. In any caſe propos'd relating to practice, let the mind free from the importunities of appetite and the tumults of paſſion, both which it is the province of conſcience to correct and reſtrain, let a man, I ſay, calmly put the queſtion to himſelf *what is right?* and, I believe, his firſt thoughts will generally ſuggeſt to him the proper anſwer, in following which he is ſafe. After-conſideration very often gives opportunity for fleſh and blood, intereſt and paſſion, to inſinuate themſelves, and mix in our counſels, and lead to tedious reaſonings, the effect of which frequently is to miſlead or perplex the mind. SERM. VII.

There are two ſources of error to which our practical judgment in matters of conſcience is liable, and of which we ſhould always be aware, and they are, ſelf-partiality, and falſe notions of religion. The former our experience, if we be attentive, muſt make us ſenſible of. We always make allowance for it in the caſe of other men, who are not ſuppoſed to be fair enough judges, in the cauſes wherein they are intereſted; and cool reflexion would ſatisfy us, that it is often ſo in our own caſe. There is

SERM. VII. is a remarkable example of this in the hiſtory of *David*, who, after committing the heinous crimes of adultery and murder ſeems to have been for a long time quite inſenſible of his guilt; a whole year paſs'd without any diſcovery of his remorſe or contrition of heart. But, when the prophet *Nathan* came to him, and in a parable repreſented to him a caſe of inhumanity and injuſtice ſome way parallel to his own, but far inferior; immediately, he was fir'd with indignation againſt the ſuppoſed offender. What ſtrange partiality was this, to have ſo high reſentment againſt the leſſer tranſgreſſion of another, whilſt he was ſtupidly unconcerned about much greater guilt of his own? The applications of the parable, however, was the means of *David*'s conviction and being brought to repentance. But after all, the remedy againſt this evil is in ourſelves, and it is the proper office of conſcience to extirpate it. For what is ſelf partiality, but diſhoneſty of heart? And therefore it is plainly contrary to conſcience, not an exception to the rule propoſed, but a direct violation of it, juſt as any other vice is, or an unruly paſſion indulged. And if we will reſolutely follow

follow the example of the text here *in exercising ourſelves to have a conſcience void of offence*. We muſt baniſh this unfairneſs of mind among other corrupt biaſſes and vicious affections. SERM. VII.

Falſe notions of religion may be with much more reaſon be thought to be an exception to the rule of following univerſally the direction of conſcience, becauſe the influence of them in miſleading men is founded, not on inſincerity or diſhoneſty of heart, as in the other caſe, but upon a religious principle, that God is in all things to be imitated and obeyed. If, therefore we have wrong opinions concerning the Deity, if we imagine him to be an arbitrary being, who governs the world by abſolute will, without any regard to equity and goodneſs, this opinion tends to inſpire men with the like ſentiments, and raiſe in them diſpoſitions contrary to benevolence. If we miſtake the will of God, and imagine things pleaſe him which really do not pleaſe him, the effect will be *ſpeaking and acting wickedly for God*, and from a principle of conſcience. They muſt be quite ſtrangers to the world, to the hiſtory of all paſt ages, and what continues to be every day done in the openeſt manner,

SERM. VII. who do not know that the moſt prodigious iniquity is committed, indeed the moſt cruel barbarities acted, under a pretence of zeal for God, for ſacred truth, and pure religion; not a deceitful, lying, pretence; but a real and firm perſwaſion. The declarations of ſcripture itſelf will not ſuffer us to doubt of this. Our Saviour tells his diſciples, *John* xvi. 2. *the time cometh, when, whoſoever killeth you, ſhall think that he doth God ſervice.* But, we need not inſiſt on any further proof, the apoſtle *Paul* himſelf is a very remarkable example. Before his converſion to chriſtianity, ſuperſtition had ſo far miſled his judgment, that he was a perſecutor, a blaſphemer, and injurious, with full conſent of mind and believing he was right: For he ſays in his apology before *Agrippa* and *Feſtus*, *Acts* xxvi. 9. *I verily thought with myſelf, I ought to do many things contrary to the name of* Jeſus *of* Nazareth; and, therefore, he ſays, *Acts* xxiii. 1. comprehending the very time of his outrageous perſecuting zeal; *I have lived in all good conſcience before God until this day*; meaning that he acted according to his preſent judgment; not againſt it, in mere compliance

pliance with luſt and paſſion, as ſome wickedly do. SERM. VII.

From what has been now ſaid it appears, that nothing can be of greater importance to men than to have their minds well inform'd concerning the meaſures of their moral conduct, and rightly to underſtand the practical principles of religion. Moſt unhappy, ſurely, is the condition of that mind which is thoroughly poſſeſs'd of pernicious errors, and the more earneſtly it purſues its own judgment the farther ſtill it goes aſtray. But, this, at leaſt, in points of the greateſt moment, is certainly not inevitable; for then our worſt errors would only be our infelicities, and our actions agreeable to them could not properly be called our ſins. But, indeed, God has made the great truths concerning his being, his perfection, and particularly his moral character, ſo manifeſt, that every man muſt diſcern them who applies himſelf to the inquiry with unprejudiced and careful attention, which is unqueſtionably the duty of ſuch creatures as we are, and for want of it our hearts will ſome time or other ſeverely reproach us. The principal parts of our religion being plain inferences from the divine moral attri-

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butes, muſt be very open to every impartial and conſiderate enquirer. And, indeed, if we will but look fairly into our own hearts, diveſted of prepoſſeſſion in favour of received opinions, it will not be difficult to ſee what is *good* and *what the Lord requires.* The very firſt dictates of nature will ſcarcely ever miſlead an honeſt heart; at leaſt they will direct him contrary to the tendency of ſuperſtition, that is, ſullen uncharitableneſs and inhumanity. It muſt be acknowledged there are ſome very difficult caſes relating to the ſubject we are conſidering, and it will be very hard to determine, how far errors of judgment excuſe wrong practice. We have no reaſon to believe that ever we ſhall be free from infirmities and miſtakes leading us to ſome wrong actions, while we are in this imperfect ſtate; and ſhall always have reaſon to join with the Pſalmiſt in this prayer, * *Cleanſe me, Lord, from ſecret faults, who can underſtand his errors?* What merciful allowances God may make for evil practices, which men who have honeſt intentions in the main, fall into through ſuperſtition, which was the caſe of the apoſtle *Paul* before his converſion; what gracious allowances may be made for them,

* Pſalm xix. 12.

I ſay, muſt be left to the moſt equitable and merciful judge of the world: And what mercy they may obtain, becauſe they act, as he did, *ignorantly in unbelief.* But, for us chriſtians, beſides the voice of uncorrupted nature which every well diſpoſed perſon may underſtand, the rule of our religion is ſo plain, ſo ſimple, ſo free from ſuperſtition of all kinds, its declarations ſo expreſs for moral piety, conſiſting in the love of God, confidence in him, and reſignation to his will; for this, and for righteouſneſs, temperance and charity, as the all of religion, and what only God will be pleas'd with; we ſhall be of all others the moſt inexcuſable if we fall into the contrary errors, and ſuffer our conſciences to be offended and miſled by them. SERM. VII.

I will only add under this head, that as a truly uniform virtuous temper and courſe of action is that only which bears an exact proportion to the human mind, making it fully and conſtantly ſatisfied and contented in itſelf; we may thus judge concerning the different caſes referr'd to: A mind, not indeed directly diſapproving itſelf, but doing what it would certainly condemn if it were not covered with a falſe pretence of zeal; I may call it a falſe conſcience, erring thro'

SERM. VII. ſuperſtition; between this and a mind free from that bias, ſelf-pleas'd, with all the good affections, benevolence to all men, as well as a zeal of God exerting themſelves harmoniouſly; both which are exemplified in the apoſtle *Paul* at different periods of his life, tho' in both he ſays of himſelf, *that he lived in all good conſcience before God.* The latter is full of peace; a calm ſerenity and joy diffuſes itſelf thro' the whole ſoul, and no diſturbing paſſions approach its reſt, the apoſtle poſſeſs'd his mind in perfect tranquillity, undiſmay'd and unterrified in the midſt of perſecution and under the immediate expectation of death, rejoicing in the *teſtimony of his conſcience that in ſimplicity and godly ſincerity, not with fleſhly wiſdom, but by the grace of God, he had his converſation in the world.* The other ſort of religion, tho' it proceeds from a zeal to God, and is in ſome reſpects according to conſcience, ye does not ſit eaſy on the mind; it is accompanied with perturbation, and vehement, tumultuous, and diſquieting paſſions. St. *Paul*, tho' he ſaid that he thought himſelf oblig'd (in conſcience) to do many things againſt chriſtianity, which is as much as can be ſaid for any one in ſuch a caſe, yet acknowledges, as *Acts* xxvi. 11. *that he was exceeding*

exceeding mad againſt chriſtians, compelling them to blaſpheme, ſurely a mind diſtracted with furious rage is in an unnatural ſtate, and ſuch as cannot be the genuine effect of religious virtue. SERM. VII.

By this time, I hope, we may be able to form a notion of what it is to have a conſcience void of offence; it is to have that ſelf-reflecting power, which in every human mind, for itſelf, is veſted with the ſovereign authority of judging what is right and wrong, and, accordingly, approving or condemning its own diſpoſitions, and actions, upon a calm, diligent, impartial conſideration, and uſing the beſt means in its power for being well informed; to have it free from the imputation and ſelf-reproach, not of all moral infirmity or failing, but of every habitual courſe of known evil, and even every ſingle, allowed, wilful, wickedneſs. It is the ſame thing which the apoſtle *John* expreſſes by *our heart not condemning us*, 1ſt *Ep.* iii. 21. And which he repreſents as the only ſolid foundation of confidence towards God; as, in fact it was the foundation of *Job*'s confidence, *Job* xxvii. 5. and of *Hezekiah*, who, under the immediate apprehenſions of death, thus expreſſes

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in prayer to God, his having a conſcience void of offence, as the only ſupport of his ſoul in that extremity, *Iſaiah* xxxviii. 3. *remember, Lord, how I have walked before thee, in truth, and with a perfect heart, and done that which is good in thy ſight.*

It is worthy of our obſervation, that the apoſtle, in this very brief ſummary of his religion, expreſsly mentions two objects towards which his conſcience was without offence, namely, God and man. But they are of different conſideration, and conſcience has to do with them in very different ways. It acknowledges God as its ſovereign Lord; its meaſures of right and wrong are his laws, and its judgments have a reference to his ſuperior unerring tribunal, for, ſays St. *Paul*, 1 *Cor.* iv. 4. *I know nothing by myſelf, yet am I not hereby juſtified, but he that judgeth me is the Lord.* Conſcience owes no ſuch reſpect to any man, no nor to all mankind; nay, it maintains its ſupremacy againſt them all; their joint acquitting verdict cannot diſcharge its accuſations, and it triumphs in its ſelf approbation if they ſhould all concur in condemning. But, the meaning is, that there being two principal objects without ourſelves, upon which our duty terminates, God

God and man, it ſhould be our care, as it was the apoſtle's, not to treſpaſs againſt either; or, that our conſciences ſhould not have matter of accuſation for violating either the one or the other branch of our duty; that along with pious affections to God, and humble ſubmiſſion to his will, we ſhould conſtantly fulfil the laws of righteouſneſs, fidelity and charity to our fellow creatures. This is abſolutely neceſſary to true virtue and religion, in whatever light we conſider it; it is only intire, not partial good affections, that will ſatisfy the obligations we are under by the law of our nature: It is univerſal obedience which the divine commandments require; *and he who offends in one point, is guilty of all.* We muſt be ſenſible that the declarations of the goſpel, the *grace that brings ſalvation*, indeed, the very deſign of it, requires that we ſhould live righteouſly, as well as godly. SERM. VII.

Secondly, I propos'd to ſhew, that the having always a conſcience void of offence towards God and man, is the proper ſubject of our conſtant and careful attention. *Herein do I exerciſe myſelf.* This is the Sum of religion, a matter of the utmoſt importance to

SERM. VII. to every man for himſelf; it requires therefore the moſt affectionate concern and the moſt aſſiduous application. The wiſe author of nature has fitted the various kinds of beings he has formed for their proper ends; animals are determin'd to purſue theirs, by inſtincts which are planted in them; but man, who is indued with larger underſtanding, and a capacity of diſcerning the nobler deſign of his creation, and the true perfection of his rational nature, is left to proſecute it in the moſt ſuitable manner, that is, by the beſt and moſt vigorous exerciſe of all his higher powers. What can be more congruous to reaſon than that our happineſs ſhould depend on ourſelves; and that, as we generally find it even in the low affairs of the preſent life, ſo it ſhould be throughout, in virtue, in moral perfection, and rational enjoyment, *that the hand of the diligent maketh rich?* But, eſpecially, as this is our ſtate of trial and preparation for a future exiſtence, God is pleas'd *now* to commit to us that which is in compariſon *little*, according to our Saviour's parable, *Luke* xvi. and *that which is another's*, that by an induſtrious improvement we may be the better fitted for *much*, and what *ſhall be our own* for ever. This is the principal point

point of our probation, whether we will in ſuch darkneſs of underſtanding, and ſo many temptations from without, and from our own infirmities, make religion and virtue our chief buſineſs; and labour above all things to maintain our integrity, or keep conſciences void of offence. Every man who thus employs himſelf will find indeed, that his labour is not in vain; that he has ſufficient encouragement to hold on his righteous way, and his work carries its own reward along with it, in the growing vigour of ſpirit and rational ſatisfaction which accompanies it; but at the ſame time he will find full employment for all the beſt capacities of his ſoul, and that the working out his ſalvation, and *making his calling and election ſure*, requires all diligence with the utmoſt care and circumſpection. SERM. VII.

The ſcripture repreſentations of a religious life are very inſtructive to this purpoſe, for the precepts of the goſpel and the examples which are propos'd to our imitation, ſhew, that we muſt run and ſtrive, and fight, having violent oppoſition to ſtruggle with, and many difficulties to make our way through. We wreſtle with *fleſh* and *blood*, with *fleſh* which warreth againſt the ſpirit,

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ſpirit, and is the ſource and occaſion of the moſt dangerous and enſnaring temptations: but it is not only fleſh and blood, but *principalities and powers, the rulers of the darkneſs of this world, and ſpiritual wickedneſs in high places.* The whole force of hell is arm'd againſt a conſcience void of offence, and all its deepeſt contrivances aim at the deſtruction of integrity. But, farther, this is a work wherein perfection is not to be attained while we are in this world, but it is the genuine temper of every ſincere perſon to be ſtill making progreſs in it, and vigorouſly aiming at perfection. St. *Paul* gives us a very lively deſcription of his own true character, and explains that exerciſe of his which is mention'd in the text, *Phil.* iii. 12. *&c. Not as tho' I had already attain'd, either were already perfect, but I follow after, that I may apprehend that for which alſo I am apprehended of Chriſt Jeſus. Brethren, I count not myſelf to have apprehended, but this one thing I do, forgetting thoſe things which are behind, and reaching forth to thoſe things which are before, I preſs towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Chriſt Jeſus.* I propoſed *laſtly*,

To

To conſider the reaſonableneſs and neceſſity of our exerciſing ourſelves therein to have always *a conſcience void of offence.* But this I hope ſufficiently appears from what has been already ſaid; indeed it is obvious to any one who will attend to it, and to deny it, is, in effect, to deny any ſuch thing as moral obligations on the human mind. For the foundation of all virtue is the ſenſe which every man feels in his own heart of the difference between right and wrong, or good and evil; the foundation of religion is an inward perſuaſion of the difference between what God requires and what he forbids us to do. To act virtuouſly, therefore, is to act according to that ſenſe and approbation of our own minds; to act viciouſly, is to act in oppoſition to it. To act religiouſly, is to conform our practice to what we believe to be the will of God; to act irreligiouſly, is directly the contrary. What, then, is virtue and religion, but to have a conſcience void of offence? And what is it to exerciſe ourſelves herein, but to make virtue and religion ſtill our ſtudy, and ſtill endeavour to practiſe it, from a conviction that we are always in danger of coming ſhort of it thro' weakneſs

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weakneſs and temptation, and that we are in our preſent ſtate imperfect.

The conduct of many, even chriſtians, is quite otherwiſe; they follow every appetite, every inclination they find in their nature, or propenſity they have contracted by cuſtom and habit, without regard to conſcience, or without examining whether it be agreeable to it or diſagreeable. And tho' it is not in their power altogether to ſilence that monitor within themſelves, yet the ſeverity of its rebukes is known to abate by a cuſtomary treſpaſſing againſt it; nay, it becomes numm'd and inſenſible, as it were, according to the apoſtle's expreſſion, *ſeared with an hot iron.* Studied amuſements, and the pleaſures of ſin, divert its admonitions. Beſides, methods are invented whereby ſinners deceive themſelves, reconciling their ſinful courſes, obſtinately perſiſted in, to the hope of acceptance with God; equivalents are put in the place of religious integrity and obedience to the moral precepts of God: great diligence in fulfilling one commandment muſt anſwer for defects in another; and, particularly, great ſtrictneſs in obſerving ſome poſitive inſtitutions, compenſates for moral impurity, oppreſſion, fraud, or unmercifulneſs.

Thus

Thus the ancient Jews, in the days of the prophets *Iſaiah* and *Jeremiah*, were guilty of heinous wickedneſs, or perverting judgment, grinding the faces of the poor, nay, their hands were full of blood, and yet they had great confidence in the temple of the Lord, and their religious reſpect to the new moons, ſabbaths, or other ſolemnities. And ſo, in our Saviour's time, the *Phariſees* were a perverſe and untoward generation, who appear'd righteous before men, but within were full of hypocriſy and iniquity; they in the mean time truſted in a negative righteouſneſs and ſome external performances. * *I am not an extortioner, nor an adulterer, nor like this publican*, was the religion of the *Phariſee* and the foundation of his hope, with the addition of mere outward obſervances; *I faſt twice in the week, and pay tythes of all I poſſeſs.* This is not to have a conſcience void of offence, but to ſubſtitute ſomething elſe inſtead of it. In like manner, ſome chriſtians deceive themſelves, imagining that a zeal for the purity of their profeſſion, diligence in attending the poſitive appointments of the goſpel, ineffectual purpoſes of a future amendment, or a preſumptuous reliance SERM. VII.

* Luke xviii, 11, 12.

on

SERM. VII. on the merits of *Chriſt*, will diſcharge their conſciences from the guilt of ſecret vices, and of appetites and paſſions immoderately indulged. Let us not be deceiv'd this way, *God is not to be mocked*, he has put conſcience in every one of our breaſts, as the guide of our actions, and a judge for him; if we violate its rights, he will certainly require it, nor is there any pretence by which we can cover ourſelves from his juſtice; nay, conſcience itſelf will one day loudly complain of its wrongs, and be the fierceſt accuſer before the divine tribunal; make it therefore a friend by repentance and good works.

SER-

SERMON VIII.

Perfect Love gives Boldness in the Day of Judgment.

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1 John iv. 17, 18.

Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment; he that feareth is not made perfect in love.

THE happiest state of mind we can attain to in this world, is an inward security and confidence towards God concerning our future felicity. Since we are convinc'd that we shall die, yet have all the reason in the world to believe that death is not an utter extinction of our being, nay, the religion we profess expressly assures us, that after it we shall be perfectly bless'd, or extremely miserable, by the righteous sen-

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tence of God; ſince it is ſo, nothing can be of greater importance than to know, if it is to be known, what foundation we have of hope or of boldneſs, as the text expreſſes it, in the day of judgment. Many, however, of mankind, even of chriſtians, give themſelves very little trouble about this matter; not that they are ſatisfied on any rational grounds their condition is ſafe, and it ſhall be well with them hereafter; but they paſs away their time in a ſtupid inattention, their thoughts are wholly employed about the buſineſs, the cares, and enjoyments of the preſent life, and for what ſhall come hereafter, they ſet it at a great diſtance, and therefore are little affected with it, or build uncertain hopes on general unexamin'd pretences, ſuch as that God is merciful, that Chriſt is the Saviour of ſinners, of them among others, that they profeſs a pure and true religion, and pay a reſpect to its inſtitutions, that their ſins are not very heinous, or if they be, 'tis their purpoſe to repent ſome-time before they die, and apply themſelves diligently to the work of their ſalvation. But, how unworthy is this of reaſonable creatures? I may juſtly apply here the words of the

the prophet *Isaiah*, * *Remember this and shew yourselves men, call to mind, O ye transgressors*; shall we leave at such uncertainty a concern which above all others is of the greatest moment? When God has put it in our power, and afforded us the best means for making our calling and election sure, shall we give no diligence in it, but leave the business of our salvation at all adventures, even treat it with more indifference than we do the affairs of this life? Which of us that had any pretensions to a large estate in this world, would not be very careful to enquire into our title, and make it as clear as possible? And shall we be remiss in endeavouring to ascertain our claim to the inheritance *incorruptible, undefiled*, and *that fadeth not away*, reserved in heaven for them that sincerely obey the gospel.

Be assured there is a sufficient certainty in this point to be attain'd; and we need not say, † *who shall ascend to heaven for us, or go down to the deep, that we may know it?* Some have actually possessed an establish'd tranquillity, in expectation of eternal life. St. *Paul* knew *whom he had believed, and was persuaded he was able to keep that which by him had been committed to him against that*

* Isaiah xlvi. 8. † Rom. x. 6, 7.

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day; ‡ *that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities nor powers*, ſhould be *able to ſeparate him from the love of God which is in Chriſt Jeſus.* Nor is this the peculiar priviledge of extraordinary characters, of men honour'd with divine inſpiration, as the apoſtle was; the grounds of it are common to ſincere and good minds, and the evidence ſuch as every one for himſelf is beſt qualified to judge of his own temper, and his own deliberate actions. My text teaches us the true, the ſolid foundation of confidence in the proſpect of the future judgment, which every ſincere chriſtian may arrive to, ſufficiently ſupporting to the upright heart in all events, and ſtable againſt all confounding fears. *Herein is our love made perfect that we may have boldneſs in the day of judgment*; *becauſe as he is, ſo are we in this world*; *there is no fear in love, but perfect love caſteth out fear, becauſe fear hath torment*; *he that feareth is not made perfect in love.* In diſcourſing on which words, I will

Firſt, Endeavour to ſhow you what is meant by the perfection of love, or our being made perfect in it.

‡ Rom. viii. 38.

Secondly,

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Secondly, The happy effect of this perfection, which is eſtabliſhing our hearts in the expectation of the future judgment, giving us boldneſs in it, and caſting out all tormenting and diſquieting fear.

Firſt, To ſhew what is meant by the perfection of love, or our being made perfect in it. We muſt obſerve that this is the grand ſubject the apoſtle treats of from the 7th verſe of the chapter to the end, as it is indeed the great principle of all moral goodneſs, and the very ſum of our duty. 'Tis true, he inſiſts chiefly and more largely on what is ſtrictly called charity, or the love of our fellow-chriſtians and fellow-creatures; not however as ſeparated from the love of God, but connected with it; for when we are urg'd to love one another, the main argument enforcing this duty is taken from the love which God has manifeſted to us in ſending his Son to be the propitiation for our ſins; which argument can no otherwiſe affect, than from a principle of gratitude or love to God, becauſe of the great benevolence and compaſſion he has ſhewn to us. And in the

SERM. VIII. words immediately following the text, it is directly ſaid, *we love him becauſe he firſt loved us.* Then follows as a juſt inference, that if we love God, we ſhould love our brethren alſo. So that the love in which chriſtians are made perfect, and their perfection in it gives them boldneſs in the day of judgment, is the love of God and of mankind; what our Saviour gives us as a comprehenſive abridgment of all religion, all the obedience which is due to the divine laws, * *To love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our ſoul, all our ſtrength and mind, and to love our neighbours as ourſelves.*

But what is this perfection in love which the apoſtle here means, ſuch as good men are evidently ſuppoſed in the preſent ſtate to attain to? I anſwer, it is not abſolutely free from every defect, every kind and degree even of moral infirmity. As there are different orders of moral agents, they have ſeveral ſtandards of perfection. An abſolute impeccability ſeems only to belong to the ſupreme Being himſelf. All creatures, the higheſt and beſt of them, ſince their underſtandings are limited, are naturally capable of being miſled; and being by the condition

* Matth. xxii. 37, 38, 39.

of

of their nature dependent and indigent, they have desires centering in themselves, the tendencies of which may possibly, in some circumstances, interfere with the benevolent affections. But, as in life and intelligence, there are different degrees, nay, and kinds of vital and perceptive powers, so it is with respect to moral perfection; there is one standard for men in this state, another for angels, or the spirits of the just made perfect; he may be a very perfect man who yet comes far short in moral excellence of the pure celestial spirits. SERM. VIII.

When, therefore, christians are said to be made perfect in love, which in effect is to be perfect in all religion and all virtue, 'tis to be understood of such perfection only, as men may attain in this life; far short of that which a good mind aspires to, and actually shall be possess'd of hereafter. It consists in the habitual prevalence of pious and virtuous affections; they rule in the heart, controuling and conquering irregular appetites and passions, and having all the inferior ones in subordination. This is what the scripture means with respect to the primary good affection of the human mind, when it requires us to love the Lord with

SERM. VIII. *all our heart and ſoul and mind*; it is a governing, and the greateſt love, not ſuch as is without all defect, which may be called ſinful, for tho' that may be ſaid to be our duty, elſe we ſhould have no reaſon to condemn ourſelves for defects, yet in the Old Teſtament where the expreſſion is originally uſed, it is intended to ſignify no more than ſincerity: for it expreſſes the condition of the covenant God made with men, which certainly was not impracticable, or above the reach of the preſent human capacity; and it is frequently attributed to particular good men who were far from being altogether faultleſs.

But, it is farther to be obſerved, that this integrity of a virtuous temper and character, has no limits ſet to it, no preciſe bounds to which it ſhall come, and no farther. The higheſt powers of our nature, and in their beſt ſtate, ſeem to be making continual progreſs; there is always room for the enlargement of the underſtanding and increaſe in knowledge, 'tis probable the mind will have the pleaſure of making continually farther advancement this way; and for the moral capacities, experience teaches us that they grow; if chriſtians do not find it ſo, they are themſelves

ſelves greatly to blame; for it is a natural and reaſonable expectation concerning them, that they ſhall become more perfect in love both to God and their brethren, more vigorous in the practice of every virtue, better eſtabliſh'd againſt temptations, more ſtedfaſt and *complete* in all the will of God. It is the genius, the very nature of true religion, that 'tis always tending to growth, juſt like the natural life to which it is frequently compared in ſcripture; for as an animal, from the commencement of its life, gradually advances towards the ſtandard of perfection which belongs to its kind, ſo new born babes in Chriſt are by the *milk* appointed for their nouriſhment, that is the doctrine of the goſpel, ſtill growing in virtue; and every perfect chriſtian will find his own genuine temper deſcribed in the account St. *Paul* gives of himſelf, *Phil.* iii. 12. *Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect, but, I follow after that I may apprehend that for which I am apprehended of Chriſt Jeſus. Brethren, I count not myſelf to have apprehended, but this one thing I do forgetting thoſe which are behind, and reaching forth to thoſe things which are before, I preſs* SERM. VIII.

SERM. VIII. *preſs towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Chriſt Jeſus.*

To underſtand this ſubject the better, it is to be remember'd, that perfection in love is really perfection in all religion and all virtue, for love is *the fulfilling of the law.* Our whole obedience to God is comprehended in love to him, as the root and principle of it. And that this is the true ſenſe of our ſacred author, will appear from what he ſays in the 5th chapter of this epiſtle and the 3d verſe, *This is the love of God that we keep his commandments:* not only it is the beſt evidence of our love; it is the thing itſelf. And in the 2d chapter and 5th verſe, *Whoſo keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected.* Our love to God is that dutiful and affectionate reſpect we owe him as the moral governor of the world, which certainly, therefore, implies obedience, or doing ſincerely and conſtantly what we know he requires. And for charity, or the love of our neighbour, St. *Paul* teaches us, that it directly includes all the duty we owe him, not only the offices of beneficence and mercy, but of juſtice, fidelity, and whatever elſe is required from one man to another; for he ſays, *Rom.* xiii. 9. *For this, thou ſhalt not*

not commit adultery, thou ſhalt not kill, thou ſhalt not ſteal, thou ſhalt not bear falſe witneſs, thou ſhalt not covet, and if there be any other commandment (directing our behaviour to our fellow-creatures of mankind) *it is briefly comprehended in this ſaying, namely, thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf.* But, tho' this is the ſubſtance of that wherein we muſt be made perfect, that we may have boldneſs in the day of judgment, it is neceſſary to add, that the ſacred writers ſometimes ſpeak of religious perfection in a comparative ſenſe. They diſtinguiſh chriſtians into children and grown men, and exhort us always to endeavour that we may advance from the one of theſe ſtates to the other; the former are the ſincere, but weak diſciples of Chriſt, in whom are the true, though low beginnings of religious virtue, ſo feeble that, as the apoſtle ſpeaks, they are like *children toſs'd to and fro with every wind of temptation*; they often fail, and are always endeavouring to recover themſelves; they are conſtantly inclin'd to do their duty, but perform it in ſuch an imperfect manner, as ſcarcely to be conſcious of what is called the ſpiritual life, or the prevalence of good diſpoſitions. The perfect man is he in whom virtuous habits have

SERM. VIII. have taken deep root, are ſo confirm'd as to be ſuperior to all temptations, and operate with ſuch eaſe and pleaſure that the mind cannot but be ſenſible of, and rejoice in the teſtimony of conſcience concerning its ſincerity.

I hope it may not be amiſs to mention ſome particular inſtances of virtue or diligence in duty, the eminent degrees whereof are in ſcripture, particularly call'd perfection; ſuch as, a conſtant attention to ourſelves, to our hearts, our tempers, and the principles of action in us, that we may fulfil our obedience to God, and be kept from offending him. This was the charge which the almighty, when he appeared to *Abraham*, and made a covenant with him, gave him, *Gen.* xvii. 1. *Walk before me*, always, as under my inſpection, always ſtudying to obtain my approbation, ſo ſhalt thou be *perfect*. A mind habitually rais'd above the world, having its affections not ſet on things on earth, but things above, with a prevailing taſte for religious exerciſes and entertainments; this is not what every chriſtian finds in himſelf, but wherever it is found, I think it may well be allow'd to belong to a character of eminence in piety; and ſo does a cuſtomary vigilance

vigilance againſt all occaſions and ways of offending. St. *James* ſays, chap. iii. 2. *If any man offend not in words, the ſame is a perfect man.* Again, eminency in the practice of charity, and mercy, is an important part of religious perfection, of which I ſhall only give you one plain proof from the words of our Saviour, *Matth.* v. When he had earneſtly recommended this virtue to his diſciples, as 'tis evident his inſtitution carries it higher than any other ever did, urging them to love their enemies, to bleſs, to do good to, and pray for ſuch, as curs'd, deſpitefully uſed, and perſecuted them; the concluſion of that diſcourſe is in theſe words, ver. 48. *Be ye therefore perfect, as your father who is in heaven is perfect*; which are thus varied in *Luke* vi. 36. at the concluſion of the ſame diſcourſe, *be ye therefore merciful, as your father is merciful*; intimating, that the moſt extenſive diſintereſted goodneſs and mercy is true moral perfection, and the beſt imitation of the Deity which the human nature is capable of. And *laſtly*, by a perſevering patience and ſteddy adherence to the cauſe of truth and virtue, under all the difficulties, afflictions, and perſecutions we meet with in life,

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SERM. VIII. life, we are made perfect in love. This will appear plainly to an attentive perſon from the nature of the thing, for what better evidence can there be of the ſtrength, and indeed the perfection, ſuch as we can attain, of good principles, than an inviolable adherence to them, and acting upon them conſtantly under the ſevereſt trials. And the apoſtle *James* has taught us ſo in expreſs words; * *Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and intire, wanting nothing.* Having thus ſhew'd you wherein the perfection of love conſiſts, or what is meant by our being made perfect in it, I proceed

Secondly, To conſider the happy effect of this perfection, which is eſtabliſhing our hearts in the expectation of the future judgment, as giving us boldneſs in it, and caſting out all tormenting and diſquieting fear. At our entrance on this part of the ſubject, it is neceſſary to obſerve, that as the mind of man reſts with ſatisfaction in the diſcovery of truth, with different degrees of ſatisfaction, however, according as the truth diſcovered is apprehended to be of importance to itſelf, ſo there are different kinds and degrees of evidence. There are ſelf-evident

* James i. 4.

propoſitions,

propoſitions, as they are called, from which we cannot withhold our aſſent as ſoon as they are intelligibly propoſed. Again, what is ſtrictly call'd demonſtration, or plain undeniable conſequences from theſe ſelf-evident actions, the underſtanding finds itſelf irreſiſtibly determin'd to acquieſce in; but then, high probability, when the caſe does not admit of farther proof, ariſing from the nature of things, from analogy, from experience, from teſtimony, where the arguments on one ſide preponderate in our judgments againſt all we can diſcern on the other, this alſo captivates the mind, and we can't help yielding to its force. Eſpecially practical principals are govern'd in their operation this kind of evidence. It is a great part of our appointed imperfection in this ſtate, that we have not an intuitive knowledge of things, which yet very nearly concern us as the objects of our affections and our purſuits. What ſhall we do in this caſe? Shall we neglect theſe things, and quit our cares about them for want of ſufficient certainty? No man reaſons or acts ſo in the affairs of common life, nay, we take up with low degrees of probability. Do men altogether decline commerce becauſe it is liable

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able to ſome riſques, and they have not an abſolute certainty of profitable returns? Will the huſbandman forbear plowing his grounds, and ſowing in the proper ſeaſon, becauſe he is not ſure of a plentiful harveſt? No, he does not ſuſpend his hopes and his endeavours for want of demonſtration; but being ſolicitous for his intereſt, and ſeeing no other way to provide for himſelf, he enters into action with confidence and diligence. In like manner the chriſtian conducts himſelf. The caſe of the ſeed-time and the harveſt, one inſtance I mentioned in the buſineſs of this life, is uſed by the ſacred writers as an image of the preſent and the future ſtate, as they relate to each other. Perhaps dry, unintereſted, and ſpeculative, rather, ſceptical minds, may think our proſpects and our boldneſs with reſpect to the day of judgment fanciful and enthuſiaſtic; there is indeed no demonſtration: But the chriſtian who has moral perfection and the happineſs reſulting from it greatly at heart, and ſtrong affections to God and goodneſs, finds evidence which is ſatisfying, which inſpires him with confidence, and excites him to aſſiduous diligence.

This

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This leads me more particularly to consider, what the evidence is upon which our boldneſs in the judgment reſts; and it has theſe two rational foundations, *firſt*, the truth of the principles of natural religion and of chriſtianity, or an aſſurance that God will fulfil the promiſes made to his ſervants, that he will finally acquit from condemnation, and give eternal life to all them who have ſincerely obeyed the goſpel. And *ſecondly*, the chriſtian's conſciouſneſs of his own ſincerity in that obedience. The former I ſhall not now inſiſt on, for I ſpeak to chriſtians, to them who believe the goſpel, and I hope the foundation need not again be laid. The other, that is, the inward conſciouſneſs, the ſubject being what paſſes in the mind itſelf, is, in general, the greateſt certainty we can attain to. We know our own exiſtence, our own faculties, and the exerciſe of them, by an immediate intuition; and this kind of knowledge admits of no reaſoning; the mind can have no clearer views, nor greater certainty of ſuch points than what ariſes from the firſt attentive ſelf-reflection. 'Tis true, experience ſhows us that the human mind is capable of ſuch diſorders, whatever the cauſe be, as to

SERM. VIII. be confus'd, and even miſled in judging of its own operations. A man under an indiſpoſition of his thinking powers may imagine he ſees or perceives what really he does not perceive; but this does not deſtroy the certainty of ſenſe and conſciouſneſs, in which we muſt neceſſarily reſt, being able to proceed no farther; and the error is corrected only by reviewing the matter in a calmer and more compos'd ſtate.

In like manner, though the heart, through inattention and prejudices, may judge amiſs concerning its own moral ſtate, which is a more complete ſubject of reflection and ſelf conſcious knowledge than the mere exerciſe of our natural powers, yet in general is this evidence to a well diſpoſed upright heart, calmly and deliberately examining itſelf, clear enough, and built upon a firm and ſtable foundation, ſufficient to all the purpoſes of the ſelf-enjoyment which ariſes from integrity, and of aſſuring itſelf before God, and having confidence of his felicitating favour. I take this ſelf-knowledge of our perfection in love, which is here ſaid to be the ground of boldneſs in the day of judgment, to be in effect the ſame with what St. *Paul*, 2 *Tim.* i. 12. expreſſes *by his knowing*

knowing whom he believed, and his perſwaſion of his ability to keep that which he committed to him againſt that day. For what is believing? What is committing the ſoul to Chriſt, which a man is conſcious of as the ground of his hope? It is not a tranſient act, but an habitual temper of mind clearly appearing to itſelf upon an impartial review, in all reſpects, and without reſerve, conformable to the goſpel; ſincere diſpoſitions and good purpoſes uniformly carried into actual execution in a pious and univerſally virtuous converſation; which was another ſubject of the apoſtle's joyful conſciouſneſs completing the former, 2 *Cor.* i. 12. *Our rejoycing is this, the teſtimony of our conſcience, that in ſimplicity and godly ſincerity, not with fleſhly wiſdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our converſation in the world.* Now what is this other than the perfection of love, as it has been explained, that is of all religious virtue, or all obedience to the goſpel? SERM. VIII.

We muſt not paſs unobſerved the reaſon which the apoſtle gives in the text, why our being made perfect in love gives us boldneſs in the day of judgment, and it is *becauſe as he is, ſo are we in this world.* That is, we are like him; as like as we

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can be, or as the frailty of our nature in this ſtate will allow. It is ſaid in the verſe immediately preceeding the text, *he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, for God is love*; that's the greateſt intimacy of fellowſhip we can have with the ſupreme being, and the neareſt reſemblance to his glorious character. I took notice before, from the words of our Saviour, that to be merciful is to be perfect, as our heavenly father is; or to make the neareſt approach that finite frail beings can make to the original fountain and pattern of all moral excellence. But becauſe the divine perfection is too high for us thoroughly to comprehend, though we ſhould always be followers of him, as dear children, it has pleaſed God to bring virtue nearer to the level of our capacity in the exemplary life of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, who *was holy, harmleſs, undefiled, and ſeparate from ſinners*, and *who in the days of his fleſh went continually about doing good.* Since, then, we profeſs to *abide in him, let us walk as he did.* I ſuppoſe it will not be thought any violence to the text, to comprehend in its meaning, that we have boldneſs in the judgment or confidence towards *Jeſus Chriſt* himſelf the judge, becauſe the *like mind* is in

in us which was alſo in him, and we imi- SERM. tate his example of holineſs and charity. VIII. Now ſurely it will be acknowledged a juſt ground of hope towards God, that we are like him, are made *partakers of a divine nature*, and *conformed to the image of his ſon*. It will appear at firſt view the high dignity of our nature, that it is capable of reſembling its author, and the greateſt glory we can poſſeſs, to imitate his purity and goodneſs without any ſinful defect. This is what our hopes ultimately terminate upon, as the very eſſence of that glory which ſhall be revealed in us. Now, indeed, we come far ſhort of it; *and it* * *does not appear what we ſhall be, but when he ſhall appear we ſhall be like him, for we ſhall ſee him as he is.* Our hopes therefore muſt be more lively and ſtrong, or we muſt have the greater boldneſs the liker we are to him now, or the more we are in this world as he is.

In the *laſt* place, the apoſtle farther illuſtrates the great advantage of perfection in love, by its caſting out tormenting and diſquieting fear. There is indeed a religious principle commonly in ſcripture called the fear of God, which is not here intended,

* 1 John iii. 2.

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and the deſcription of the text does not at all belong to it; it is a dutiful affection to the deity, that reverence and honour we have, and ought to have for him as our gracious heavenly father, whereby we are inclined to keep all his commandments, and with the utmoſt caution to avoid offending him; far from being caſt out by perfect love, as inconſiſtent with it, it is inſeparable from it. The very object of it is the divine goodneſs, as the prophet * *Hoſea* ſpeaks, *they ſhall fear the Lord and his goodneſs*, and it hath no torment, but diffuſes ſerenity and joy thro' the ſoul. But the fear here ſpoken of, and which love caſts out, is the ſervile dread of puniſhment, the diſtracting terror of divine vengeance, that fearfulneſs which, as the prophet *Iſaiah* ſays, *ſurprizes the hypocrites*, and wherewith unreformed ſinners are afraid; the language of which is, *who can dwell with devouring flames and everlaſting burnings?* And tho' even this conſideration is ſet before impenitent ſinners very reaſonably, if poſſible, to alarm them and bring them to a ſerious thoughtfulneſs about their condition, yet is it not a principle of itſelf ſufficient to produce religious

* Hoſea iii. 5.

virtue;

virtue; and when the more ingenuous affection of love thoroughly poſſeſſes the heart, it is caſt out; not all at once, but by degrees. Theſe principles, directly oppoſite, may, low and imperfect meaſures of them, meet in the ſame mind; but ſtill as the one increaſeth, the other will abate. He that feareth may have ſome ſmall beginnings, and weak degrees of love, but when love becomes perfect, that fear is caſt out. SERM. VIII.

I ſhall now conclude this diſcourſe with the following reflections.

Firſt, by what has been ſaid, we are led to conſider the genius, and admire the excellence of the chriſtian religion. What can recommend any inſtitution more than that it has provided a ſufficient conſolation againſt the fear of death and judgment? Death would not be ſo terrible as it generally is to mankind, if it were not for the judgment which is expected to follow; but 'tis this which holds them in bondage, from a ſecret conſciouſneſs of guilt, and therefore dread of the divine diſpleaſure. But, now the goſpel has brought us comfortable tidings concerning thoſe moſt important points; death is aboliſhed, and it has brought life

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and immortality to clear light; it aſſures us indeed of judgment to come, but teaches us to meet it with boldneſs; not only in general there is a glorious foundation laid for our hope, God is propitious to ſinners, and his favour may be obtain'd upon the gracious and practicable conditions of ſincere repentance and the amendment of our ways; but we know how to apply this comfort to our own minds, and thereby fortify them againſt the terror which is otherwiſe natural to them. What can be more rational than the doctrine of chriſtianity, particularly, of my text upon this head? Surely it is not the worſe, but ſo much the more excellent for approving itſelf to our reaſon. What man, attending deliberately to the principles of natural religion, could place his hope towards God on any other bottom than the perfection of love to the ſupreme being himſelf, to goodneſs, and to mankind? Or can we have a ſurer claim to acceptance with God than a conſciouſneſs of our conformity to his glorious moral character, and our being in the world, as he is.

Secondly, let us therefore, give all diligence to *make our calling and election ſure*, to

to conform our title to the heavenly inheri- SERM. tance, and increaſe our confidence, by cul- VIII. tivating all religious and good diſpoſitions, and adding to our faith all the chriſtian virtues; ſtill ſtudy to make ourſelves more perfect in love, and let it abound more and more in *knowledge and in all judgment, being ſincere and without offence*, filled with the fruits of righteouſneſs. Other foundation of hope can no man lay. 'Tis true, ſinners have invented others, when their hearts could not help enquiring *wherewith they ſhould approach the Lord, and bow to the high God*; ſuperſtition founded on wrong notions of the Deity and his moral government, has led them to come *with, rams, and with oil, and the fruit of their bodies to atone for their ſins*; but the ſcripture has inſtructed us to do what is morally good, as the ſure way to happineſs and peace; *to do juſtly, and love mercy and walk humbly with our God.* Even chriſtians themſelves have been weak, or rather perverſe enough to ſubſtitute ſomething elſe in the room of perfect love, and a ſelf approving mind, as the ground of their confidence. Some truſt in the truth of their religious opinions, others in the regular performance of ſolemn inſtituted ſervices; than which

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which nothing can be more unaccountable, conſidering how fully ſuch pretences are diſapproved by plain reaſon, and the current of the ſcripture declarations. Others abuſe the doctrine of Chriſt's ſacrifice, and of faith in his blood, by putting it in the place of a good conſcience for giving us boldneſs in the judgment. But certainly to hope in Chriſt for obtaining the favour of God, while men continue in their tranſgreſſions, is to make him the *miniſter of ſin*, and to make void the divine law, *which he came not to deſtroy but to fulfil*. Conſider his own deciſion of this point, *Matt.* vii. 24. *Whoſoever heareth theſe ſayings of mine and doth them, I will liken him to a wiſe man, who built his houſe upon a Rock; and the rain deſcended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that houſe, and it fell not, for, it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth theſe ſayings of mine and doth them not, ſhall be likened unto a fooliſh man who built his houſe upon the ſand; and the rain deſcended, and the floods came; and the winds blew, and beat upon that houſe, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.*

SER-

SERMON IX.

Loving CHRIST above all, the Character of his true Disciples.

Matth. x. 37.

He that loveth Father or Mother more than me, is not worthy of me. And he that loveth Son or Daughter more than me, is not worthy of me.

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THE chapter of which my text is a part, contains the first and solemn charge which our Saviour gave his apostles when he sent them forth to preach the gospel. As that was a very arduous undertaking, and consequences of the greatest moment depended upon it, to the service of God, and the good of mankind, it was necessary they should be well instructed how to behave themselves in it. And because they were to meet with such opposition from the ignorance and prejudices of men, as could not be conquered by the

SERM. IX. the meer force of plain reaſon and perſuaſion, therefore were they furniſhed with extraordinary powers to do ſuch miracles as might engage the moſt ſtupid to attend to their doctrine. Their maſter inſtructs them how to conduct themſelves in the exerciſe of thoſe powers, and in general to regulate their whole deportment with prudence and ſimplicity, ſo as they might give no offence, but with unblemiſh'd characters ſucceſsfully purſue the great deſign of their miſſion. One article relating to this embaſſy was of the laſt moment, and it is very largely inſiſted on. The apoſtles were to ſuffer grievous perſecution, being ſent out as ſheep among wolves, men of ſavage and barbarous tempers, inflamed with a ſuperſtitious paſſionate zeal, who would, without regard to their innocence, treat them with cruelty and rage.

Their Lord endeavours to fortify their minds againſt that event, arguing from a variety of topics for equanimity and patience under all their ſufferings: Such as, that he had ſubmitted himſelf to the ſame ſtate, and ſurely then they had no reaſon to repine, nor to hope for an exemption from it. For "*the* "*diſciple is not above his maſter, nor the* "*ſervant*

"*servant above his Lord.*" That in spite of all opposition their cause should triumph, and themselves with it be in high reputation and esteem, when their enemies should be covered with shame. That they were under the special care and protection of divine providence, which orders all things wisely for the best: And that there is a time coming when a resolved adherence to the cause of truth and pure religion shall be gloriously rewarded, and the desertion of that cause, through the fear of suffering persecution and contempt from men, and the prevailing love of this world, shall be punished as it deserves. *Lastly*, our Saviour deduces the patient enduring of afflictions, even when attended with the most bitter circumstances, such as losing the friendship and incurring the utmost displeasure of our nearest and dearest relations: I say, he deduces it from the common obligations of christianity. Supposing the case to be just as he states it in the verses preceding the text, that the gospel does not produce the proper and genuine fruit to which by its own nature it tends, which is peace and charity among men, but that on the contrary it becomes the occasion of hatred and quarrels, so far that a man's nearest friends

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friends are his moſt violent enemies: Even this muſt be ſubmitted to, and the fury of domeſtic adverſaries borne by the followers of Chriſt, rather than they ſhould relinquiſh the truth, and make ſhipwreck of a good conſcience. Which, after all, amounts to no more than what is eſſentially imported in their religious profeſſion, and a juſt conſequence from the firſt conditions of their inliſting in his ſervice. For what do we mean by taking upon us the chriſtian profeſſion, and calling ourſelves the diſciples of the Lord Jeſus? Certainly, that we prefer his approbation, and the favour of God upon his terms, to all conſiderations in this world, and are ready to part with every thing for it. Therefore, if the moſt eſteemed friendſhip ſtand in the way, and we cannot hold it at leſs expence than forſaking our duty as chriſtians, it muſt be abandoned: "*For no man can ſerve two maſters: For* "*either he will hate the one, and love the* "*other; or elſe he will hold to the one, and* "*deſpiſe the other. Ye cannot ſerve God and* "*Mammon* *." One of the plaineſt leſſons in chriſtianity is, "*ſeek firſt the kingdom of* "*God, and his righteouſneſs* †." But this it-

* Matth. vi. 24. † Matth. vi. 33.

ſelf,

self, pursued through all its just consequences, will lead us up through all the degrees of religious perfection: And to act the part that is necessary for obtaining the crown of martyrdom itself, there needs no more than to apply that general rule to a particular case fairly comprehended in it. Thus you see what a consistency and connection there is in the whole frame of religion. And to rise to the greatest heights which can be attained in it, no more is required than a firm adherence to its easiest and plainest rudiments, and to build regularly on the first principles we have learned. SERM. IX.

If it be so, we had need to see that the foundation be well laid; that is, that we rightly understand the terms upon which we enter into the christian profession, and dedicate ourselves to the service of our Lord.

One essential condition is contained in the text, that is, love to Christ above all others, and a deliberate preference of him to our neareſt earthly friends; and, by parity of reason, to whatever else in this world may come in competition with him for our affection and esteem. None of us can be ignorant, that this is what our Saviour indispensably requires. It is yet more strongly expres'd

SERM. IX. expreſs'd in the xivth of St. *Luke* and the 26th verſe, but the meaning is the ſame as here. "*If any man come to me, and hate not* "*his father, and mother, and wife, and chil-* "*dren, and brethren, and ſiſters, yea and his* "*own life alſo, he cannot be my diſciple.*"

In diſcourſing on theſe words, I will *Firſt*, conſider, what it is to be worthy of Chriſt.

Secondly, I will ſhew, what is meant by the Love of *him*, as in compariſon with, and oppoſition to the love of friends, and all other worldly intereſts; from which the truth of this declaration will appear, that we cannot be worthy of him upon other terms than preferring him to every thing elſe.

Firſt, Let us conſider what it is, to be *worthy* of Chriſt. And this we find is very well explained in the paſſage juſt now referred to by this expreſſion, *he cannot be my diſciple*; that is, he cannot be a ſincere chriſtian; he may call himſelf by that name: But whoſoever doth not come up to the terms here required, is not a chriſtian in heart

heart and in truth. This manner of speaking is very usual in the New Testament. At the 11th verse of this chapter, our Saviour orders the apostles, when they went into any city or town, first to enquire, who in it were *worthy*; that is, as far as can be judged, men of probity and candor. Sincerity is the sum of moral worth; and the whole value depends upon it, when a religious profession is the point to be estimated. The apostles, after their master, speak in the same strain. St. *Paul* exhorts christians to *walk worthy of God*, which he explains, "* *by walking worthy of the vocation, wherewith they are called.*" That is, suitably to the hopes, the privileges, and the rules of it. God has called us to his kingdom and glory, and he has called us to holiness. To be worthy of him, therefore, and of his calling, is to fulfil the obligations of our religious character, as his professed servants and followers, and to be qualified upon his own terms for the recompence he has promised. It is never to be imagined that men could lay any previous obligation on God, or our Lord Jesus Christ. The divine mercy prevented us, when we

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* Eph. iv. 1.

SERM. IX. were altogether unworthy, and our ſalvation by the goſpel is wholly of grace. And when we perſevere in our obedience to it with all the worthineſs we can attain to, for it is ſtill imperfect, we muſt at laſt *look for the mercy of the Lord Jeſus unto eternal life.* But, when we receive *the word of his kingdom into good and honeſt hearts, and bring forth fruit with patience*; when we ſincerely comply with the conditions of acceptance which he has eſtabliſhed, and continue in them, then does "*our God count us worthy of his calling*, as the apoſtle ſpeaks, 2 Theſſ. i. 11, 12. *that the name of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt may be glorified in us, and we in him.* This, I hope, will diſpoſe us the more diligently to attend to the particular doctrine of this text, namely, the love of Chriſt above all, declared by himſelf, to be one eſſentially neceſſary qualification, without which we are not worthy of him, or his approved diſciples, intitled to his acceptance, and the reward of his kingdom. I come therefore,

Secondly, To conſider the love of Chriſt as in compariſon with, and oppoſition to the love of friends, and all other worldly intereſts.

interests. The meaning of the text is, by no means, that christians should not love their relations, father and mother, brethren and sisters; nor is that the meaning of the yet stronger expression, before mentioned, that they should "*hate father and mother*, "*brethren and sisters, wife and children*, "*yea and their own lives.*" Such affections have deep and firm foundation in nature and reason. The wise and good parent of mankind, intending the safety and happiness of them all, has planted an instinct in every human heart, whereby it is inclined not only to care for, and do good to itself, but to the whole kind. And considering the circumstances of our condition in this world, the indigences of an infant state, the infirmities of old age, and the opportunities of mutual help, which are afforded by cohabitation in families; it is for the common advantage of the species, that there should be nearer attachments, and that such relations as those of parents and children, brethren and sisters, should be endeared, and the benefit which may arise from them, secured by a peculiarly tender affection. As this may be justly attributed to God as its author, and his wisdom and goodness

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ſhine in it, religion is not intended to root it out, or in any degree to weaken the bonds of humanity. On the contrary, it ſerves rather greatly to confirm and ſtrengthen them. God has expreſsly eſtabliſhed the obligation of relative duties by his own poſitive law, and annexed the promiſe of a great reward to the ſincere and careful performance of them. In ſcripture, to be without natural affection is repreſented as one of the worſt characters. To ſet light by father and mother is a moſt heinous wickedneſs, highly diſpleaſing to God. And for a man to neglect caring and *providing for his own, eſpecially thoſe of his own houſe, is to deny the faith, and be worſe than an infidel* *.

But, the immediate ends of theſe natural relations are not the higheſt ends of our being. We are capable of nobler purſuits and higher enjoyments, than the eaſe and conveniencies of our preſent condition. And in order to theſe, our minds are endued with affections of a ſuperior nature; the love of what *Solomon* calls wiſdom, with its *excellent and right things*, and the love of the ſupreme Being, the fountain of all goodneſs and happineſs, in whom all moral per-

* 1 Tim. v. 8.

fections

fections are absolute, and infinite. This is the love which ought to be the most intense, and to rule in our hearts. Reason teaches us, that our affections ought to bear a proportion to the worth of the object. It is reputed great weakness, at least, to be immoderately fond of trifles, and neglect things of the highest dignity and importance. Now, it must be acknowledged by every intelligent creature, who has any notion at all of God, that he is the most excellent, and therefore the most amiable of all Beings; for in him infinite natural and moral perfections meet. He is not only most powerful and wise, which characters our minds naturally admire; but in conjunction with these he is perfectly righteous, *a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he:* And he is *good to all, his tender mercies are over all his works.* No man then, if he would, can with-hold his assent from this proposition, that God is the worthiest object of our affection, and our hearts must necessarily condemn us in preferring other things to him. And as this is what the light of nature teaches men, so the first and great commandment of God's po- SERM. IX.

SERM. IX. fitive law is, "* *thou ſhalt love the Lord thy* "*God with all thy heart, and with all thy* "*ſoul, and with all thy mind:*" That is, with ſincerity, and an inward affection as the conſtant abiding principle of obedience; and with chearfulneſs and delight, running in the way of his commandments. This ought to be the ruling principle in our minds, controuling and directing the meaſure and exerciſe of all our other affections: For the leaſt reflection will convince us, that there being a variety of inclinations and deſires in our nature, which are the ſprings of action, there muſt be a ſubordination; ſome muſt neceſſarily yield to others: And ſo we find in experience. It is the predominant affection which conſtitutes the character, and temper of a man. The covetous is he, in whom the love of wealth prevails over all other inclinations; the ambitious in whom the love of honour; the voluptuous, in whom the love of ſenſual pleaſures. Each of theſe will ſacrifice every other intereſt to his idol, and every other deſire, which is even natural to him, yet not ſo ſtrong. But to preſerve an univerſal harmony in the mind of man, and to conſtitute a truly religious and virtuous character, the love of

* Matt. xxii. 37.

God,

God, and of goodness ought to be predominant. Other affections are not to be rooted out, but this must be supreme; and they gratified and indulged only by its permission, and so far, as not to be inconsistent with it. SERM. IX.

This is the true meaning of my text. For what I would principally observe for illustrating this subject, is, that the love of Christ, and the love of God and goodness, is just the same. His professed design, which he uniformly pursued in his doctrine, and through the whole course of his actions and sufferings, was to glorify his heavenly father; that is, to promote righteousness, piety and virtue in the world, which is the image and glory of God; to recover men from their corruption and degeneracy to the sincere observance of his laws, and the imitation of his holiness. It can never then be imagined, that he intended to set up himself as an object of our esteem and affection, by way of distinction from his father: As he says himself, * *he and his father are one.* It is his glory to be the *express image of the Father's person,* and to *declare him, whom no man hath seen at any*

* John x. 30.

SERM. IX. *time.* So that *whoſoever hath*, that is, knows and loves the ſon, the *ſame hath the father alſo.*

It is apparent likewiſe that ſome of the principal motives of affection, propoſed in ſcripture, to God, and to his ſon, are the ſame. The perfections of power, wiſdom, holineſs, and goodneſs are aſcribed to both. *The works that the father doth, the ſame doth the ſon likewiſe. The worlds were made by him, and in him all things conſiſt. He works with the father hitherto*, in the providential care, and government of the world. If the divine attribute of perfect holineſs is the moſt worthy of our eſteem and imitation, our Lord Jeſus Chriſt is alſo holy, harmleſs, undefiled, and ſeparate from ſinners, and has given us a moſt complete pattern of all amiable virtue, that we ſhould follow his ſteps. If the love of God manifeſted to us, not only by the gifts of his providence, but eſpecially by the benefit of our redemption, be an argument for our gratitude to him, the ſame conſideration ſhould excite our love to Chriſt; for he *loved us, and gave himſelf for us, to redeem us from all our iniquity.*

And

And as moral excellence is the inseparable character of the Deity, so that it is absurd to pretend that we love him without loving it; that we love the holiest and best of all Beings, without loving holiness and goodness itself; the same is true concerning our Saviour, whom the scripture always represents, as therefore altogether lovely, because he is altogether holy, and most compassionate to sinners, intending their happiness by saving them from their sins. Indeed, the idea which the gospel principally intends to give us of him, is that of the image of the invisible God, the *brightness of the divine glory*, as manifesting in the most conspicuous manner the moral perfections, the essential purity, and infinite goodness of the Deity. And if we consider the humiliations, the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, which indeed contain powerful motives to love him, it is the greatest absurdity, and the highest dishonour to him, to separate these from what he intended to accomplish by them, namely the restoring and promoting true holiness and virtue among men. * *He gave himself for us, to redeem us from all our iniquities,* SERM. IX.

* Titus ii. 14.

and

SERM. IX. *and to purify unto himſelf a peculiar people zealous of good works:* He loved his *church, and gave himſelf for it; that he might ſanctify and cleanſe it, with the waſhing of water, by the word; that he might preſent it unto himſelf a glorious church, not having ſpot or wrinkle, or any ſuch thing; but that it ſhould be holy and without blemiſh* *.

Upon the whole then, it is evident that the love of Chriſt, or the love of God, manifeſtly contains in it the love of righteouſneſs and goodneſs, eſſentially importing a diſpoſition to practiſe it; and if we mean any thing elſe ſeparate from, and unconnected with this, we certainly deceive ourſelves. Some ſeem to place it in an unintelligent zeal and warmth of imagination, without conſidering the true character of the object; expreſſing itſelf by an intemperate heat for ſpeculative notions and external circumſtances, ſuppoſed to belong to the religion of Chriſt, with violence againſt all, who are differently minded concerning them. But, ſurely a rational love to any perſon, is founded on juſt apprehenſions of his real character, and it ſhows itſelf by a ſtudious imitation of him, and a conſtant endeavour

* Eph. v. 25, 26, 27.

to

to please him in all things. If an illustrious character be known to us only by description; and yet more especially, if it falls within our own observation and acquaintance, the admiration of it naturally inclines us, as far as we can, to form ourselves upon the same model. And if he is loved as a good man, with whom we have to do in any relation, we will undoubtedly endeavour to recommend ourselves to his approbation, in our whole behaviour. This is the love which our Lord Jesus Christ requires of all his disciples, that they may be worthy of him, and this affection in a higher degree than is allowed to father, mother, brother, sister, any other person, or any other thing in this world. SERM. IX.

Now, from all that has been said, the truth of our Saviour's declaration in the text sufficiently appears; that without such love to him, as has been described, greater love than we have to father, mother, or any thing in life, yea, than to life itself, we cannot be worthy of him, or be his sincere disciples. Indeed the declaration itself is enough to satisfy us in this point. For since Jesus Christ is the author of christianity, it is he only who must fix the terms of it.

Every

SERM. IX. Every man is at liberty as to his entering into that profeſſion: It is a voluntary act, and he may chooſe for himſelf, whether he will do it, or not. But as to the conditions, he is not at liberty. They are eſtabliſhed by the author in the original inſtitution unalterably. But we may obſerve, that whatever other repreſentations are given us of the terms, they perfectly agree with this: And in what ever true light we take chriſtianity, it is impoſſible to anſwer the deſign of it, without coming up to what is here required. If it be a divine religion, intended to repair the moral blemiſhes and defects of human nature, and reſtore men to innocence and virtue, that they may be qualified for enjoying the favour of God. How can this be accompliſhed without their being brought to a prevailing love of innocence and virtue; which, as I have ſhown you, is loving Chriſt more than any thing elſe?

Again, let us conſider that to be worthy of Chriſt, to be his true diſciples, and obtain his acceptance, it is abſolutely neceſſary that we ſhould adhere to him inviolably, that we *ſhould hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering, and be ſtedfaſt and immovable in good works: For they only who endure*

endure to the end shall be saved, and to them alone who remain faithful unto death, the crown of life is promised. Now, the only possible security of this stedfastness, is love to Christ, and to religion and virtue above all. Without it; whenever the interest of any prevailing object of affection comes in competition with our duty, we shall desert it, and cleave to the more beloved idol. St. *Paul* tells us, 2 *Tim.* iv. 10. That "Demas "*forsook him, having loved this present* "*world.*" And, indeed, according to the account which the apostle *John* gives us of the love of the world, * that it comprehends the "*lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and* "*the pride of life,*" or the pleasures of the external senses, riches, and honour, to it must be attributed the numerous heresies and apostacies of the primitive times; especially if we add to it, cowardice, which is an undue love of life, or loving it more than Christ and our duty. SERM. IX.

I shall only add, that a stedfast, and universal obedience to him, is imported in our being worthy of Christ, or his sincere disciples. The very notion of a christian is one who keeps the commandments of Christ.

* 1 John ii. 16.

Without

SERM. IX. Without that, the name is a meer inſignificancy; or rather, it is hypocriſy. Now this obedience is the genuine inſeparable fruit of prevailing love to him; it is the teſt, to which our profeſſed affectionate regards to him, are to be brought, that we may judge with certainty, whether they are ſincere, or not. "*If ye love me*, ſays our Saviour himſelf, *John* xiv. 15. *keep my com-*" *mandments.* And verſe 21. "*He that* "*hath my commandments, and keepeth them,* "*he it is that loveth me.*" Nor is there any thing elſe, which in reaſon can be ſuppoſed, to preſerve us in a ſteddy, and univerſal obedience to his laws. Other principles and motives may produce a temporary and external conformity, or rather appearance of conformity to them: But in many inſtances, and thoſe of the greateſt moment, their influence will fail. If the demands of a perſon, or object, more beloved than Chriſt, interfere with his precepts, the ſtronger affection will carry the mind, and thereby govern the practice. And the deliberate offence in that one point is an eſſential breach, forfeiting the chriſtian character and hopes: So that the keeping of the whole law, that is, all the reſt of it, paſſes for

for nothing, according to St. *James*'s account, chap. ii. 10. SERM. IX.

Thus it appears, that a superior love to Christ, loving him more than father, or mother, brethren or sisters, any worldly interest, and even life itself; that this, I say, is absolutely necessary to our being worthy of Christ, or his sincere and accepted disciples.

It remains now that we make some application of this subject: Which may be the better done, because our Saviour himself has gone before us, in applying it, to one of the highest and most difficult points, in the practice of religion, that is, to the case of suffering persecution. It must be acknowledged a very severe trial to be in a state of enmity with one's nearest relations, and for a man to have his *foes, those of his own house*, continually treating him ill, and ready to betray him, and deliver him up to the most grievous sufferings. This is the case supposed: And how shall a christian support himself in it? There is no principle that will bear him out, but a superior affection to Christ: And this, if it be strong enough, will do it effectually. It is true, the friendship of relations is very desirable;

as

SERM. IX. as ſufferings by their hands are peculiarly bitter. But that friendſhip is not to be purchaſed, nor the ſufferings avoided at ſo great an expence, as abandoning the cauſe of religion: And whoſoever will act that part, let him not pretend, that he loves Chriſt. His practice is an irrefragable demonſtration of the contrary. If the frowns of a father, the hatred of a brother, and the danger of his life, are prevented at the expence of an indignity to Chriſt, can he deny, that he loves them more than him? Men may attribute their fainting in the time of trial, and relinquiſhing their duty through fear of perſecution to a pitiable weakneſs, while they flatter themſelves, they have ſtill a ſincere affection to the good cauſe they deſert: But according to the judgment of our Saviour, it muſt be otherwiſe. And we may every one be convinced of it, if we deliberately attend to the reaſon of the caſe. For can there be any ſincere affection to God, to our Saviour, and to his cauſe of pure religion and virtue, if it be not a prevailing affection, ſtronger than any other, which oppoſes it in the heart? But that it is not ſo, by the ſuppoſition is manifeſt. Who can ſay he has a greater

greater regard to Christ, than to his life, and to men, if to save it, he denies him before them? SERM. IX.

But, we may apply this also to other, and more ordinary purposes in the practice of religion. If the commanding love of Christ be a sufficient defence against the strongest temptations, it may well support the mind against lesser ones. And indeed tho' the greatest things in religion may be effected by the force of this principle, the least and the easiest cannot be done without it. There are other trials of integrity and virtue, besides persecution, arising from the common relations, and affairs in life: And the friendship of this world too commonly betrays men into enmity against God. Our affection to our friends and worldly interests may mislead us, by flattery, as well as terror: and their insinuating smiles may prove a snare as well as their frowns. If a christian then shall be in such an unhappy situation even in his own house, as to be sollicited to sin, by his most intimate friends; if their example, or persuasions allure him to that which is evil; let him remember that first and most indispensable law of his religion, to love his God, and his Saviour, *more than*

SERM. IX. "*Father and mother, wife and children, brethren and ſiſters, yea and his own life alſo.*"

This, in the caſe of temptation to idolatry, was expreſsly provided againſt by a divine declaration; and it may by parity of reaſon be applied to other caſes. *Deut.* xiii. 6, 8. "*If thy brother, the ſon of thy mother, or thy ſon, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy boſom, or thy friend, which is as thine own ſoul, entice thee ſecretly, ſaying, let us go, and ſerve other Gods—Thou ſhalt not conſent unto him, nor hearken unto him.*" Beſides this, there are other temptations which derive their force from the ſame root, the love of our intimate friends; and are only defeated by the ſame principle, a ſuperior affection to Chriſt. There is nothing more common in the world, than for mens families to be ſnares to them: While to make a large, or (as they pretend) a competent proviſion for them, they violate their conſciences, and ſin againſt God, either by direct injuſtice, or, at leaſt, by ſuch immoderate ſollicitude, and inceſſant toil, as is inconſiſtent with piety, leaving no room for the exerciſes of it; or by ſuch narrowneſs, and *withholding more than is meet*, as is directly contrary

contrary to charity. But, let us remember, SERM. that this is to render ourselves unworthy of IX. Christ, by loving sons or daughters, or other worldly interests more than him.

Besides, distresses befalling our friends, their deaths and misfortunes, which, considering the vicissitude of human affairs, are always to be expected, and they are to some minds, at least, among the most sensibly affecting trials in life; these are to be supported on the same principle. An inconsolable grief for them can never consist with a transcendent love to God, and our Saviour. For so long as the supreme object of affection remains unalterable, there is always a sufficient fund of consolation against all inferior losses.

Thus you see of what general use to all the purposes of a religious and happy life, this condition of discipleship, or of christianity would be, which our Saviour here requires. It would establish us in our christian profession; it would produce universal obedience to his laws, and make our *works perfect before God:* It would be a defence against all sorts of temptation, and minister comfort under the most grievous distresses in life. When we fail in any of

SERM. IX. theſe articles, it is to be charged to the account of a defect here, to the want, or weakneſs of our love to Chriſt.

The concluſion, then, is, that we ſhould endeavour always to have this principle ſtrengthened in us, as the root, from which every religious virtue muſt grow up to its full maturity. I do not mean by this, a mere zeal of affection, and vehement emotion of mind without underſtanding; but a rational and deliberate eſteem, founded on a clear apprehenſion of infinitely amiable moral excellency, and calmly directing to every good work, according to that admirable deſcription the apoſtle gives in the 1ſt chapter of the epiſtle to the *Philippians* from the 9th verſe, "*that your love may abound yet more* "*and more in knowledge and in all judgment:* "*That ye may approve things that are ex-* "*cellent, that ye may be ſincere, and without* "*offence till the day of Chriſt. Being filled* "*with the fruits of righteouſneſs, which are* "*by* Jeſus Chriſt *unto the glory and praiſe* "*of God.*" In order to this, nothing can be ſo effectual (indeed without it nothing can be effectual) as a ſerious attention to the motives of love. What elſe can excite a rational affection? If we compare all the objects

jects that sollicit our desires, every enjoy- SERM. ment in life, with the amiable glories of the IX. divine nature, and the *excellent* and *right things* of religious wisdom, they will be found lighter than vanity, unworthy of our choice. And for raising this esteem, and inflaming your grateful and pious affections to God, you have a great advantage by the gospel ministrations, which represent to you so clearly the glory of God in Christ, and the greatness of his love manifested in our redemption. Meditate on this, that your hearts may be warmed with fervent love to him, who so tenderly loved you; and that the love of Christ may constrain you, thus judging, * "*that if one died for all, then* "*were all dead: And that he died for all,* "*that they who live, should not henceforth* "*live unto themselves, but unto him, which* "*died for them, and rose again.*"

* 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

SERMON X.

Of the proper Improvement of Occaſions of Sorrow.

Eccleſiaſtes vii. 2, 3, 4.

It is better to go to the houſe of mourning, than to go to the houſe of feaſting, for that is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, for by the ſadneſs of the countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wiſe is in the houſe of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the houſe of mirth.

SERM. X. THE main ſubject of this book is the vanity of all things under the ſun. Though the frame of this world is very good, and ſo the wiſe creator pronounced it when it came out of his forming hand, that is, it was faſhioned exactly according to his own model for the intended purpoſes;

purpoſes; it anſwer'd his deſigning idea, and contained a glorious diſplay of his perfections, particularly his goodneſs; yet with reſpect to human happineſs it is utterly inſufficient: Which kind of vanity ariſes not from the ſtate and nature of outward things themſelves, for that is juſt as it ſhould be under the direction of perfect wiſdom; but partly from the conſtitution of the human mind, which is plainly intended for purpoſes beyond this preſent ſcene, and partly from mens irregular deſires and expectations, whereby being led to flatter themſelves with fooliſh hopes of contentment, and ſatisfaction of mind, in the poſſeſſion of ſome worldly good, they are plunged into perpetual diſappointments and vexation of ſpirit. The preacher proves his doctrine by a general ſurvey of the courſe of this world, which, though governed by ſteady counſel, is ſo various, and to our underſtanding uncertain, that no man knows what outward events may happen to him, nor what is really and in the whole for his advantage. He examines alſo particular things, on which men ſet their hearts, hoping for great happineſs in them, ſuch as riches, grandeur, knowledge, reputation for wiſdom, and religious

SERM. X.

SERM. X. profeſſions, with a laborious external devotion; and he ſhews that none of all theſe come up to what our nature determines us ultimately to purſue, that is ſolid and laſting happineſs, which indeed is to be deſpaired of under the ſun, that is, from all temporal and earthly enjoyments.

What then? ſhall we abandon altogether the hope of any good, at leaſt, while we are in this world? ſhall we give up ourſelves to an utter deſpondency, as *Solomon* tells us in this book, chapter ii. 20. *He cauſed his heart to deſpair of any good from his labour?* No certainly; there is a real and ſolid good which human nature is capable of *even now*, though but in its infancy of being; and by a due improvement of the preſent opportunities, it is prepared for a greater, even a complete felicity hereafter. The ſum of this is to *fear God and keep his Commandments*, which our author ſays, is the *all of man*, the whole of his intereſt and of his duty; and it is not comprehended in the things under the ſun, which he calls vanity. Not only ſo, there are ſome ſentiments, a certain temper of mind and behaviour, even with reſpect to theſe ſublunary things, which prevents inconveniencies, temptations, and inquietude

quietude from them; nay, and makes them ſubſervient to our higheſt intereſts, the occaſions of improving our minds in virtue, and fitting them for more excellent enjoyments. SERM. X.

Of this there is a remarkable and very comprehenſive inſtance in the text. Whereas the generality of men, on the firſt face of objects and events, as they appear to ſenſe, immediately engage their deſire or averſion, and determine their purſuit; they eagerly follow after what at firſt ſeems agreeable, with profuſe delight, and as eagerly flee from the contrary. Feſtival ſolemnities, and parties of pleaſure where mirth is indulg'd without any reſtraint, have a gay inviting appearance; moſt people are therefore fond of them, and readily embrace every opportunity of ſuch entertainment; but events which have a more ſevere and mournful aſpect, ſuch as bring death to remembrance, are ſtudiouſly avoided. Now *Solomon* adviſes the very reverſe of this; he judges it better *to go to the houſe of mourning, than to the houſe of feaſting*; to accuſtom our hearts to the attentive conſideration of afflicting occurrences, particularly death, than indulge them in licentious jollity; for though the latter is preferr'd at preſent by weak

SERM. X. weak and careleſs minds, yet it has a dangerous tendency, and often proves bitterneſs in the end: But the other, in its firſt appearance leſs pleaſing to the ſenſes, is more reaſonable in itſelf, and contributes to the neceſſary inſtruction of the underſtanding, and bettering the heart. I ſhall endeavour in the following diſcourſe, *firſt*, to explain a little farther what the preacher here recommends, *Sorrow as better than laughter*, the *going to the houſe of mourning, and having our hearts there, rather than in the houſe of feaſting and mirth. Secondly*, the reaſons he inſiſts on for enforcing his advice, namely, *that death is the end of all men*; therefore it is for the advantage of *the living to lay it to heart*, and to render the thoughts of it familiar to them, whereby they ſhall increaſe in wiſdom and virtue.

Firſt, I am to explain what the preacher here recommends, *ſorrow as better than laughter, going to the houſe of mourning, and having our hearts there, rather than the houſe of feaſting and mirth.* The expreſſions are plainly proverbial, and the deſign of them is not fulfill'd merely by the external actions, which are mentioned in a literal ſenſe: What wiſdom, what merit or virtue

is

is there in going to funeral ſolemnities, any more than to merry-meetings, if the temper, the thoughts and behaviour be the ſame, or no better? And certainly it may be ſo. Do not we ſee daily vaſt multitudes of people aſſembling on ſuch occaſions, who, if they would aſk themſelves what they came for, could give no other anſwer, than that it was to mix in a crowd of company, to entertain themſelves with the magnificence of the funeral pomp, or, at beſt, to pay a civil complement to an afflicted family, and the laſt reſpect to their deceaſed neighbour, without any more ſerious and affecting Impreſſions of mortality upon their minds, than they would have at a public rejoicing? What *Solomon* therefore intends, is, that we ſhould make it our diliberate choice to go to the houſe of mourning, on purpoſe to have our hearts affected with the ſadneſs of the occaſion, and the monitory inſtance of mortality which is there preſented to us; or rather, that wherever our bodies are, we ſhould deſignedly engage our attention to ſuch ſubjects; that we ſhould ſeriouſly meditate on the frailty and uncertainty of human life, the impoſſibility of avoiding death, which makes a very important change in the

SERM. X. the condition of men, and other points of a parallel nature and tendency, which, though not so agreeable to flesh and blood, are most worthy of the mind, and may have a salutary effect to the improving and entertaining its higher powers: For it is to be observed, the text says, the *heart of the wise is in the house of mourning*, but the *heart of fools in the house of mirth*; the bodily presence is of very small consideration, but the proper employment of the thoughts and affections is principally to be regarded, and the other chosen by a wise man, only with a view to promote it.

Secondly, when mournful are declared better than joyful occasions, and sorrow than mirth, the meaning is not to banish all pleasure, even of the external senses, from human life. *Solomon* in this book often takes care to prevent misconstructions of that sort; he calls upon men to rejoice in the fruit of their labour, and in their portion under the sun; not to indulge themselves in the excesses of sensual gratification, which, as he speaks, takes away the heart, darkens the understanding, and enervates the mind; but to receive with gratitude, and enjoy with chearfulness the external gifts

gifts of liberal providence within the bounds of innocence and virtue. Almighty God has ſo framed the human nature, adapting its conſtitution to our ſtate of being, that we have a variety of affections anſwering to the various objects without us, which may be in ſeveral ways neceſſary to our preſervation, and to ſuch happineſs as we are now capable of. We have deſires towards thoſe things which contribute to life and health, and there is pleaſure annexed to the uſe of them; we have fears, directing us to avoid what may be hurtful or inconvenient; and our ſorrows themſelves have a ſalutary tendency to our advantage. But there is a ſubordination in our powers and affections; ſome higher in their kinds than others, and more important to the ends of our being; and there is a proper regulation of their exerciſe, which in a great meaſure depends upon ourſelves, yet not without ſufficient intimation from the author of nature how it is to be conducted. None of our affections are to be pronounced evil; they are the contrivance and the workmanſhip of a wiſe and good agent, and they all ſerve good purpoſes; but experience ſhews that they are capable of being abuſed; by being immo-

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derately

SERM. X. derately indulged, ſome grow to a faulty exceſs, ſo that they obtain an aſcendant in the mind, forming its temper, while others are neglected, nay, induſtriouſly weakened, and the objects of them avoided, which are no leſs, perhaps more ſuitable to our condition, and uſeful to the main ends of life. This is the caſe of ſorrow and mirth, the due ballance of which makes a proper conſtitution of temper well fitted to our preſent ſtate, and an overgrowth of either is hurtful. As here we have a mixture of good (I mean natural good) and evil, we are called to grief and joy alternately, avoiding extremes of both. Exceſſive ſorrow diſſipates the vigour and compoſure of the mind, takes away the reliſh of our enjoyments, not excepting the higheſt and beſt of them, and will greatly indiſpoſe us for our duty in ſome of the moſt important inſtances; but the error of multitudes lies on the other ſide; their light and fluttering ſpirits have no taſte for any thing but what is gay and mirthful; by habit this grows to an utter impotence of mind, and a perfect averſion to every thing which has a ſad appearance, or is ſo much as grave and ſerious: Now this is no way agreeable to the ſtate of man upon earth;

earth; for, as *Job* says, he *is of few days and full of trouble*, nay, *he is born to it*, and it is as natural to him as *for the sparks to fly upward*; and *Solomon* tells us, that *God has given to man vexation, and travel, and grief, as a part of his portion under the sun.* It is therefore necessary to reconcile our minds to a serious thoughtfulness about things, which for the present seem not to be joyous but grievous, that we may know the better how to bear our part in them, since they are the common lot of mankind, and a discipline which divine providence uses, in order to produce the *peaceable fruits of righteousness*. Particularly, though death be naturally the aversion of all living things, and seems to be a very dismal subject, we should accustom ourselves to think of it, whereby the horror and fear of it may be abated, and, which is of greater moment, we may be led to such a preparation, as shall happily prevent the greatest dangers. To enforce this upon our minds, I shall in the next place, SERM. X.

Consider the reasons insisted on in the text, namely, that death is the end of all men, therefore it is for the advantage of the living to lay it to heart, and to render the thoughts of

SERM. X. of it familiar to them, that they may increaſe in wiſdom and virtue. The firſt reaſon is, that death is the end of all men; why then ſhould we put it from our thoughts? Why decline the ſerious conſideration of it? If indeed unthoughtfulneſs were any ſecurity againſt the event itſelf, if declining to entertain it in our meditations, or a ſupine negligence about it, could prevent the fatal ſtroke, there would then be reaſon to baniſh the gloomy diſturbing ſpectre, which caſts a dark ſhadow over this world, and palls our appetite to the pleaſures of life: But, alas, it is quite otherwiſe; death is inevitable; it will come whether we think of it or not; and it will be the more ſurpriſing and the more terrible, the leſs it has been conſidered. This now is one obvious ſenſe of the aſſertion in the text; death is the end of all men; none of mankind can with any ſhew of reaſon, expect to be exempt from mortality, and indeed none profeſs ſuch an expectation. The experience of all ages which have gone before us, and the inſtances which are daily before our eyes, ſhew that this is the common fate of mankind: Their condition in life has always been, and ſtill is, very unequal with reſpect to

to power, honour, intellectual endowments, and other diſtinguiſhing priviledges, which are eſteemed among them very conſiderable; but at laſt death puts all upon a level, *their breath goeth out, they return to their earth*, and none *has power over the ſpirit to retain it, neither is there any diſcharge in that war.* And as thus it appears in fact that all men die, ſo they who believe a governing providence, muſt attribute this event to unchangeable appointment. For the good pleaſure of God mankind were created, by the ſame good pleaſure they ſubſiſt upon the earth, which was given them to dwell in, not all at once (for that end it would not be ſufficient) but in ſucceſſion, and it is evidently as much the courſe and law of nature that we ſhould die, as be born. This immutable decree of heaven concerning the human race, is fully declared to us in ſcripture, where we meet with only two exceptions to it in the caſe of *Enoch* and *Elias*, both attributed to a divine miraculous interpoſition. And St. *Paul* reveals this myſtery, that they who ſhall be alive upon the earth at Chriſt's ſecond coming, ſhall not indeed die, but undergo a change equivalent to that, which ſhall be effected in others by death and the reſur-

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SERM. X. rection; for *flesh and blood*, or the present animal constitution of our nature, *cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither can corruption inherit incorruption*; but for the rest of mankind we are expressly told it is *appointed for them all once to die*

Secondly, death is the end of all men in this sense, that it finally and for ever terminates their state in this world, translating them into a quite different, and entirely new stage of being: It puts an end to their labours and enjoyments, to their various relations in life, and in the very day of death *their thoughts perish*, their desires, their hopes, their fears, their sorrows, their love and hatred, as *Solomon* says elsewhere in this book, their projects for good or evil to themselves or others; these shall all cease, and, which is of all the most important consideration, their state of discipline shall cease, and where death leaves them, judgment shall find them. The life of man is a curious and wonderful piece of the divine workmanship, it contains a beautiful variety of powers and affections, of business and enjoyment; there are united in it two beings of essentially different kinds, a particular system of matter, consisting of a numberless multitude

multitude of parts admirably put together, and diſpoſed with the clear evidence of amazing wiſdom, ſo as to ſerve their ſeveral uſeful purpoſes; and a ſpiritual ſubſtance, the regent of the body, indued with powers of a very high nature, the ſpring of thought and various operation, ſelf conſcious and capable of pleaſure and pain in a great variety. Between theſe two, however different, there is ſo intimate a relation (we know nothing parallel to it) as to conſtitute one perſon, or one living intelligent agent, ſuch is their mutual dependence, that the mind perceives for the whole body, cares for all its members, and directs all their motions; and, on the other hand, the corporeal organs convey to the mind the knowledge of external objects, and are the fit inſtruments of its active powers. By this union the human life is related to, and intereſted in, the affairs both of the intellectual and material world: It is capable of rational and moral, and alſo of ſenſitive happineſs; and it is capable of the contrary ſufferings. But there is a ſubordination of its parts and of their affections, exerciſes, pleaſures and pains; thoſe which are purely mental, are SERM. X.

SERM. X. of a vaſtly higher nature and conſideration to the main ends of our being, than thoſe of the body, and the former ſhall endure, when the others are quite periſhed. The principal deſign of providence in this whole conſtitution, is, that the ſoul ſhould be put into the natural body for a time, ſhort, when compared with the whole of its duration, under diſcipline, that acting a good part in this firſt ſtage, improving its own intellectual and moral powers, maintaining its ſuperiority over the animal nature, and practiſing virtue, in oppoſition to infirmities and temptations, it might be prepared for another ſtate, a ſtate of perfection and happineſs. What an important change then doth death make? It finiſhes all the advantages and diſadvantages of our preſent condition. The light of the living is withdrawn, and we are removed *into the land of forgetfulneſs*. No more pleaſure is conveyed by the eyes, or any other organs of ſenſation, no more ſatisfaction ariſes from the conveniencies and ornaments of life, from friendſhips, relations, or ſocial communication with any of mankind in this world; no more opportunity of fighting, what the ſcripture calls *the good fight, of working out our ſalvation, and of*

of seeking glory, honour, and immortality, by a patient continuance in well-doing; for there is no labour, nor wisdom, nor device, nor knowledge in the grave. SERM. X.

It must therefore be our wisdom, and greatly for our advantage, to enter into an affecting consideration of this important subject, that we may act the part becoming us with respect to it, and make the necessary preparation for our inevitable fate. This is one reason by which *Solomon* enforces his advice, to choose going to the house of mourning, or habituating our minds to a serious and deliberate reflection on mortality, for, says he, the *living will lay it to his heart*; which expression imports something more than barely considering it. The same object, it is certain, may appear to the mind in very different lights; the understanding may enquire into it, even accurately, may examine its nature, its various properties and relations, yet with the utmost coldness and indifference; it is the affections, and a particular application to ourselves, that determine the importance of things, excite emotion, and have an influence on the temper and practice. How calmly and unconcernedly do men think and speak of objects and

SERM. X. events remote from themſelves, ſuch as diſtant dangers and diſtreſſes, which at the ſame time they know muſt in the moſt ſenſible manner affect thoſe who ſhare in them? The moſt lively deſcription cannot raiſe ſuch paſſions, ſuch fear and ſolicitous deſire, prompting all the active powers to exert their utmoſt force, as if the caſe were our own. In like manner we may think of death in a very unaffecting way, and without laying it to our hearts, while it is not applied to ourſelves, and conſidered as that which muſt very ſoon make an important change in our own ſtate. It is ſurely of the laſt moment for the living to lay death to his heart, in the ſenſe now mentioned, becauſe his religious preparation, conſequently his happineſs in a future ſtate, depends upon it; and it contains ſome of the ſtrongeſt motives to the practice of our duty. But notwithſtanding the difference which I have obſerved between thinking of death, and laying it to heart ſo far, that they may be ſeparated; yet is the former a proper and a rational, though not always a certainly effectual means of producing the other. We find by experience, that things which do not ſtrike our minds very ſtrongly at firſt view,

view, by an attentive meditation, and re- SERM. volving them often in our thoughts, pro- X. duce a great concern, and affect us very powerfully. This may very reaſonably be, and frequently in fact is the caſe with reſpect to the preſent ſubject, which is the very reaſon of *Solomon*'s advice, namely, that inſtead of eſtranging our minds from the thoughts of death, and baniſhing it as a diſagreeable object which will marr our pleaſures in life, we ſhould rather deſignedly entertain the apprehenſions of it, and induſtriouſly ſeek occaſions of bringing it to our remembrance, on purpoſe to engage our affections, and work up our hearts to a ſerious concern and juſt ſolicitude about an awful event, on which ſo great conſequences depend.

But the great practical objection, if I may call it ſo, that is, which influences the affections of men, and determines their conduct, though, if we examine it, it muſt appear to the underſtanding very inſufficient, is taken from the diſagreeableneſs of the ſubjects, mortality, and others which have a connection with it. To think often and deeply on death, with an application to ourſelves; and, as what we muſt expect, is a

SERM. X. very melancholy entertainment; it fills the mind with horror, ſpreads a gloom over the face of all worldly comforts, and damps our active powers in purſuing, as well as our pleaſure in enjoying them; therefore do ſo many remove this ſorrow from their hearts, and put the evil day far off in their imaginations, if they cannot do it in reality. It is not, however, thus, that we reaſon, or that we govern ourſelves in parallel caſes; if a man has an important intereſt at ſtake, if there be any ground to apprehend the loſs of his fortune or his reputation, what doth he do? Doth he put it out of his thoughts becauſe he wou'd not give himſelf trouble? No, it affects him ſenſibly, and his concern puts him upon uſing his beſt endeavours for preſerving what is in danger; or, if even that appears inevitable, he cannot help being thoughtful about it, meditating upon the nature and extent of his misfortune, and enquiring with anxiety how he may make the beſt of it, and if there be any poſſibility of mending his condition afterwards. As to the caſe now before us, death is certain, and thereby the loſs of all our preſent enjoyments; the poſſibility of preventing it, is a point abſolutely

abſolutely to be given up: But how awful is the ſequel! And it is now depending, it muſt be either very happy, or very miſerable, according to our behaviour. Now when we are ſure of ſo great a change in our ſtate as death makes, the irrecoverable loſs of life, and whatever is deſirable to us under the ſun; and there is, we know, a much greater intereſt than life at ſtake, and a more laſting condition of happineſs or miſery, than any in this world abiding us, according as our deeds done in the body are good or evil, ſhall we decline thinking on this change, and ſecurely run this hazard, rather than give any interruption to our ſhort lived pleaſures by the preſent uneaſineſs which muſt attend a ſerious conſideration? SERM. X.

But *Solomon* carries the argument yet farther; he doth not content himſelf with urging the certainty of death, and the neceſſity which is laid upon the living to lay it to heart, as a counterballance to the ſorrow which will accompany their thoughtfulneſs about it; he goes farther, I ſay, and aſſerts that this ſorrow itſelf is ſalutary, and even eligible, on the account of its tendency to the improvement of the mind, in wiſdom

SERM. X. dom and virtue, which is the *Third* reaſon enforcing the advice in the text. The heart *of the wife is in the houſe of mourning, and by the ſadneſs of the countenance the heart is made better.* It is ſtill to be remembred, that he doth not mean to recommend ſorrow merely for its own ſake; every one knows that it is a painful paſſion, though at the ſame time we know too that nature determines us ſtrongly to it upon ſome occaſions, ſo that the mind even chooſes it, and takes a kind of pleaſure in afflicting itſelf: But ſo far as reaſon has any ſhare in regulating our paſſions, it is becoming us to conſider the end of them, and by a regard to that, to govern ourſelves in entertaining, or oppoſing them. It is farther to be obſerved, that as all our paſſions are liable to exceſſes, ſo is this in a remarkable manner. Grief is ſometimes extreme, when the occaſion is ever ſo juſt; when the mind is overwhelmed and enfeebled by it, and ſo rendered incapable of vigorouſly purſuing the proper remedy, which is the very deſign of the grief itſelf. St. *Paul*, 2 *Cor.* ii. 7. was apprehenſive of this danger to the penitent offender, whoſe grief was very juſt under the cenſure which he ſuffered for his ſcandalous offence,

and

and therefore he adviſes the *Corinthians* to forgive him, and confirm their love to him, leſt, ſays he, *ſuch a one ſhould be ſwallowed up of overmuch ſorrow.* But, the true reaſon why the ſorrow duly limited, or rather the ſerious temper of mind, which accompanies calm and deliberate thoughts of mortality is in itſelf eligible, and actually choſen by wiſe men, rather than a thoughtleſs levity of mind, and an uninterrupted merriment in ſenſual enjoyment, the reaſon, I ſay, is, becauſe it is a good means of making the heart better: Better in a moral ſenſe, that is, more virtuous and religious. It is acknowledged by us all, that there is a reality in religious virtue, and that it is abſolutely neceſſary; but the people of a gay turn of mind will think and ſay, "we hope inno-" cent mirth is not inconſiſtent with it," which indeed is true; but let them conſider that the mirth which excludes ſerious thoughtfulneſs concerning religion and the future ſtate, or indiſpoſes them for it, is not innocent, though it ſhould be free from what is in its own nature vicious. SERM. X.

More particularly, the advantages of what I have ſhown to be the meaning of ſorrow in the text, are, *firſt*, that it naturally leads us

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us to an attentive meditation on God, and providence, and a future ſtate. when one, ſedately, and with a ſolemn compoſure of mind, ſets death before himſelf as the end of all men, and his own end, he cannot avoid looking up to the ſupreme directing cauſe of this event which is the great, wiſe, juſt, and good governor of the world, who having placed man upon earth for an appointed time, turns him again to deſtruction, and ſays, *return ye children of men*, leave this ſtage to account for the ſeveral parts you have acted in it. Now, theſe ſentiments entering deeply into the mind, every one ſees, are productive of true piety, of reverence for the ſupreme Being, the irreſiſtible ruler of all things, fear of offending him, confidence in his mercy as our only refuge, obedience to his laws, and ſubmiſſion to his will. From the ſame fountain will proceed a diſpaſſionate indifference to the things of this world, both what is called good and evil in it, or proſperity and adverſity, ſince they are ſo tranſitory, and the effect of them is confined to the preſent ſtate, they do not reach to the grave, where, as *Job* ſays, *the weary are at reſt*: And on the other hand, all the counſels and projects of men for their worldly happineſs ceaſe

ceaſe for ever, for, *their purpoſes are broken off, even the thoughts of their hearts*, Job xvii. 11. and, verſe 16, their deſires and hopes of that kind *go down to the bars of the pit*, where men however diſtinguiſhed in life, reſt together in the duſt; in other words, this affecting conſideration produces temperance, humility, and patience, virtues of great importance to a religious life, and the only ſolid foundation of true inward peace and ſerenity of mind. SERM. X.

I ſhall conclude with the following reflections. *Firſt*, the great and ruling deſign which we ſhould conſtantly purſue, and take our meaſures according to its direction, is the bettering of our hearts, or, the improving ourſelves in wiſdom and virtue. That our ſcheme of life may be conſiſtent, and becoming ſuch creatures as we are, it is neceſſary that ſome principal end ſhould be always aimed at, and all our deliberations terminate in it. Now, what can be more worthy of our character as intelligent and moral agents, what more ſuitable to our profeſſion, than this I have propoſed? To abandon ourſelves wholly to the purſuit of preſent pleaſures, without any further view, is not to act either as men or chriſtians; but to make it our chief ſtudy, and the

SERM. X. the main intention which ſhall govern our counſels, and our courſe of action, that we may grow wiſer and more virtuous, this is what our own minds will approve, and we profeſs to believe that the happy effects of it will abide with us for ever. And where is the man that muſt not acknowledge he needs to have his heart made better, that he is not yet perfect, neither has already attained that practical knowledge, and thoſe meaſures of piety and goodneſs which he ought, and may arrive to?

Secondly, in order to ſo great and valuable a deſign, let us with firm reſolution lay a neceſſary reſtraint on our ſenſes and imagination, the moſt unfit counſellors in ſuch an affair. Let us learn to deny their moſt importunate cravings, to retrench their pleaſures, to ſilence their tumults, and reconcile ourſelves to what may appear to them ſevere, particularly to inure our minds to the thoughts of death, and have our hearts often in the houſe of mourning.

SER-

SERMON XI.

The Happineſs of the Righteous in all Circumſtances illuſtrated.

Iſaiah iii. 10.

Say ye to the Righteous, that it ſhall be well with him.

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SCARCELY can one imagine a more calamitous and diſmal ſtate of things in any nation or city, than the prophet here deſcribes, as actually the condition of *Judah* and *Jeruſalem*, a ſtate of extreme poverty, and even famine; the *ſtay of bread* and the *ſtay of water* was taken away; the foundations of civil government were deſtroyed, and their defences againſt dangers, either from abroad, or from within, the defences both of wiſdom and ſtrength, utterly ceaſed, as well as thoſe arts and improvements which adorn human life, and are the beauty and ſtrength of ſociety. There

SERM. XI. There was no more to be found among the *Jews, the mighty man, and the man of war, the judge and the prophet, the prudent and the ancient, the captain of fifty, and the honourable man, the counſellor, the cunning artificer, and the eloquent orator.* What could be expected but immediate ruin to ſuch a country? And the prophet attributes it to the juſt providence of God puniſhing that degenerate people for their iniquities; for, ſays he, verſe 8, 9. *Jeruſalem is ruined, and Judah is fallen, becauſe their tongue and their doings are againſt the Lord, to provoke the eyes of his glory; the ſhew of their countenance doth witneſs againſt them, and they declare their ſin as Sodom.* But notwithſtanding all this evil, and indeed whatever confuſion may happen at any time in the world, whatever diſtreſs may come upon particular men, or any number of them, the caſe of mankind is not abſolutely and univerſally unhappy: It ſhall be well with ſome, and the difference of mens conditions principally depends on their moral characters. As this is clearly inſinuated in what I already obſerved from the prophet's account of the miſery of the *Jews*, and the ruin of their nation by their crimes, it is expreſsly and very

very ſolemnly declared in the text, *ſay ye to the righteous it ſhall be well with him:* Do not imagine that I mean to pronounce one event to you all, or to put good and bad upon a level; the wiſe and righteous ruler of the univerſe will diſtinguiſh men, and all other moral agents, by their diſpoſitions and behaviour, and will render to them according to their works. SERM. XI.

This certainly is a doctrine of the greateſt importance; the very being of religion depends upon it: Unleſs we are perſuaded, that virtue is good, and vice ill for us, what can induce our minds to chooſe the one and refuſe the other? And as it is of the utmoſt importance, ſo no principle is more evident: It has been the ſupport of anxious diſturbed minds in all the changes of their ſtate, even in the deepeſt affliction; though ſome good men have had difficulty enough to keep themſelves always in the affectionate belief of it. In ſuch a caſe as that which the text refers to, it was very neceſſary that it ſhould be earneſtly and warmly inculcated, that the righteous, by its influence, might maintain their integrity, and not turn away from their righteouſneſs, either through evil example, or the temptations which

SERM. XI. might accompany public, almoſt univerſal, calamities. But at all times it is moſt worthy of our ſerious attention, as eminently uſeful to engage our inviolable adherence to the cauſe of virtue, and that we may eſcape the *corruption that is in the world*. I ſhall therefore in the following diſcourſe, *firſt*, endeavour to explain this ſubject, by ſhewing you who are the righteous, and in what ſenſe it ſhall be well with them, or, they ſhall be happy. *Secondly*, I will conſider upon what evidence the prophet's aſſertion reſts, or how it appears that there is a connection between righteouſneſs and felicity.

Firſt, I am to explain this ſubject, by ſhewing you who are the righteous, and in what ſenſe it ſhall be well with them, or, they ſhall be happy. It is the more needful to conſider carefully this important diſtinguiſhing character, becauſe men are apt to run into miſtakes concerning it, to place it in things wherein it doth not at all conſiſt, at leaſt which are very remote from its eſſence. Not but that the notions of right and wrong, of moral good and evil, are obvious to the human mind, and their difference eaſily diſcerned; the ideas of ſenſible qualities are not

not more clear and diſtinct: But in this mixed ſtate, when men are neither perfectly good nor bad, the exact boundaries are not ſo eaſily fixed, eſpecially when an application is made of theſe characters to particular perſons, and we judge concerning ourſelves, in which caſe prejudice and ſelf-partiality often miſlead men; and ſuperſtition, a very prevailing evil among mankind, contributes to theſe errors, by leading them to imagine, that there is righteouſneſs and religion in thoſe things, which have really nothing to do with it. SERM. XI.

In general the righteous is *he*, in whoſe heart the morally good or pious, virtuous and pure affections rule, and whoſe practice is habitually conducted by their direction; the man who loves God above all things with his *heart and ſoul*, who *fears him and eſchews evil*, whom no allurement of worldly pleaſure, profit, or honour, no fear of worldly loſs or ſuffering, can perſuade to deſert his duty, to act againſt his conſcience, or wilfully and deliberately to tranſgreſs any divine law known to him: Not the perſon who is altogether free from any infirmities, which, ſtrictly ſpeaking, may be called ſinful, and who never, through the whole

SERM. XI. courſe of his life, has by ignorance or ſurpriſe been drawn into thoſe indeliberate actions, which upon a review he cannot juſtify. If this were the ſenſe of righteouſneſs, who could pretend to it? For *there is not a juſt man that liveth upon the earth and ſinneth not.* But it has pleaſed God graciouſly to accept of men upon lower terms, even upon the terms of ſincerity, upon a predominant inclination and purpoſe of heart to do his will, appearing by the fruits of piety, temperance, juſtice, and charity, habitually in their lives.

Theſe are the righteous with whom it ſhall be well, for they are the objects of God's approbation and favour, according to the ſettled unalterable rule of proceeding in his moral government. It is true, this is particularly and very expreſsly taught in the ſacred ſcriptures: The prophets with one conſent declare, that the upright man, though not wholly free from moral defects, pleaſes God; and they preach the doctrine of repentance, promiſing in God's name the remiſſion of all their ſins to ſuch as ſincerely comply with it, or, *that if the wicked forſake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, the Lord will have mercy on*

on him, and abundantly pardon him; and who doth not know, that the ſame is ſtill more clearly taught in the new teſtament: But it is alſo perfectly agreeable to our natural ſentiments concerning the Deity; what hope could men have towards him, if it were not ſo, and how inſignificant would religion be to its main profeſſed ends? SERM. XI.

If this be the true notion of the righteous man, a character concerning which every one is the beſt judge for himſelf, being conſcious of the operations of his own mind, and of the affections, the principles, and motives from which he acts; and indeed, as the apoſtle *John* teaches us, when we can aſſure our hearts before God, and they do not reproach us for inſincerity, or prevailing evil affections, then we have confidence towards him; but, I ſay, if this be the true notion of the righteous man, our next enquiry under this head, is, in what ſenſe it ſhall be well with him. The meaning certainly is not, that he ſhall poſſeſs all external advantages and enjoyments in this world, whereby his condition ſhall be rendered more eaſy and proſperous than that of the wicked. That is contrary to fact and experience, as well as to many plain declarations

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rations of ſcripture: It is not thus that God diſtinguiſhes his favourites, nor do righteous men place their happineſs in outward proſperity. *There be many that ſay, who will ſhew us any good?* That inceſſantly, and with the greateſt eagerneſs purſue ſenſual and earthly gratifications as their chief good, which, becauſe they cannot find in any one object (for no one object of that ſort can content the mind of man) therefore they ſeek it in a variety, and the end of their wiſhes is ſtill undetermined: But the ſtable uniform deſire of the good man, is, that *God may lift on him the light of his countenance*, or grant him his favour, which is better than life. Nor is it to be thought, that divine providence will always interpoſe to reſcue the righteous from thoſe calamities that come upon the world of the ungodly in which they live; it was not the intention of the prophet to aſſure them, that they ſhould be preſerved from the ruin of *Jeruſalem*, and the common fall of *Judah*, which was to be expected becauſe of their crying national ſins, in which the righteous had no ſhare; but that in all events they ſhould be happy, even though they were involved in the common deſolation, and periſhed with the multitude of ſinners;

ſinners; for the judgments of God pro- SERM. cured by the wickedneſs of men do not al- XI. ways ſeparate between the precious and the vile, but he ſuffers them frequently to fall together; ſtill however, even in death itſelf, making a great and important difference between them. It is true, there are ſome inſtances of providence interpoſing for the deliverance of eminently good men from common deſtructive plagues: Thus *Noah*, and his family eſcaped that flood which overthrew the foundations of the wicked; and righteous *Lot* was delivered from that *vengeance of eternal fire*, as the apoſtle calls it, which conſumed *Sodom* and *Gomorrah*. Such inſtructive examples ſhew, that God has not forſaken the earth, that his eye *runs to and fro to mark the perfect, and ſhew himſelf ſtrong in behalf of the upright*; and they are imperfect ſketches of his juſt adminiſtration, which will finally diſtinguiſh men according to their doings with the moſt exact equity; but they are rare examples; the ordinary courſe of things is otherwiſe, and as far as relates to the outward ſtate of men in this world, there *is one event to the righteous and to the ſinner*.

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We muſt therefore, in order to underſtand fully how it ſhall be well with the righteous, enlarge our notion of the ſtate of man; we muſt conſider him in the whole of his being, his ſoul as well as his body, and in every condition and period of his exiſtence. It is thus we judge concerning our ſtate within the compaſs of the preſent life, and its affairs: A man may be eaſy and proſperous in the main, when his principal intereſts are flouriſhing, although he meets with various diſappointments in things which are of leſſer moment. In like manner we may juſtly ſay, it is well with good men when their ſouls proſper; they enjoy inward peace and ſatisfaction, and their future happineſs is ſecured, though they are liable to ſufferings in this preſent time, which, as the apoſtle * ſays, *are not worthy to be compared with the glory that ſhall hereafter be revealed in them*; and though they are not exempted from the common frailties, nor the extraordinary diſtreſſes which are incident to the reſt of mankind, and the ſocieties they belong to. The pleaſure, the high ſelf-enjoyment which ariſes from a conſciouſneſs

* Rom. viii. 18.

of

of virtuous integrity, together with a firm unſhaken confidence in God, the joyful expectation of a future more perfect happineſs, and the ſure poſſeſſion of it when this life is ended; theſe are the portions of ſincere perſevering righteouſneſs; for, as this prophet elſewhere teaches, chapter xxxii. 17. *the work of righteouſneſs ſhall be peace, and the effect of it quietneſs and aſſurance for ever.* This is more fully and particularly explained to us in the ſcripture. God has brought life and immortality to clear light through the Goſpel, and by his ſpirit revealed, as St. *Paul* teaches 1 *Corinthians*, xi. 9. thoſe things which he has prepared for them that love him; things which *eye hath not ſeen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive.* But at all times, and under every diſpenſation of religion, there has been ſtill ſufficient reaſon to believe that it ſhall be well with the righteous, or that there is an eſtabliſhed inſeparable connection between virtue and happineſs, which leads me to what I propos'd.

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Secondly, to ſhew the truth of the prophet's aſſertion in the text, that it ſhall be well with the righteous, or that he ſhall be happy: Whatever becomes of the ſociety he

SERM. XI. he belongs to, whatever miſeries may befal his fellow citizens or countrymen, and whatever outward calamities he may be involv'd in jointly with them, there is real good reſerved for him, and he ſhall be happy in proportion to the degree of his righteouſneſs. And here, as I have ſtated the notion of that happineſs which is conſequent upon virtue only in general, without deſcending to thoſe particular bleſſings and enjoyments, which chriſtians either know by experience, or are taught to hope for by the revealed rule of their religion, ſo I ſhall begin the proof of the doctrine, with that evidence which is common to mankind, and muſt appear to every perſon who carefully attends to it. Let us then, firſt of all, conſider the ſtate and conſtitution of the human nature as in fact we find it, abſtracting from any inquiry concerning the author of it, and his deſigns and conduct towards us. Every ones experience makes him ſenſible of pleaſure and pain, or of happineſs and miſery, of both which we all of us partake in ſome degree. It is almoſt as plain, that both enjoyments and ſufferings are of different kinds; and the moſt general and important diſtinction is into *mental* and *bodily*. Who doth not

not know, or cannot compare in his own reflecting thoughts, the difference between the gratifications and uneaſineſſes of the external ſenſes, and of the mind? But it is too little attended to, and yet very certain, that the latter are of vaſtly greater importance to our intereſt than the former. Scarcely is there any man not conſcious, in ſome meaſure, of the ſatisfaction which ariſes from morally good diſpoſitions, at leaſt ſome particular kinds of them, ſuch as ſocial and natural affection, benevolence, compaſſion, or gratitude; and that this is ſtronger and more intenſe than the enjoyments which any ſenſible object can yield, appears from this conſideration, that the latter are frequently ſacrificed to the other; nay, the moſt grievous bodily tortures are ſubmitted to by men of very imperfect moral characters, rather than they will foregoe the pleaſures of their ſuppoſed virtue. Beſides, it might be eaſily ſhewn, that not only the enjoyments of ſenſe are mixed with ſome honourable appearance of virtue, which ſhews the neceſſity the human mind is under of paying reſpect to that divine form, but that really ſenſual pleaſure is heightened to the poſſeſſor, by that ſpecies of morality, which attends

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attends it in his imagination, by the appearance of generoſity, freedom, friendſhip, or ſocial communication. Who doth not know, on the other hand, the pains of a ſelf-accuſing and condemning heart? How abject, how mean, and odious, doth an immoral character appear to every one who diſcerns it, at leaſt in an extreme degree? How vile, how deſpicable is the miſer, and the luxurious? How much abhorred the cruel, the ungrateful, and perfidious? But how much more hateful *to himſelf* is the obſtinately vicious, the impious, and the wickedly diſhoneſt man, when he is forced to review his actions, and look into his own heart? He has no feeling of rational manly ſelf-enjoyment; on the contrary, galling ſelf-reflections and inward remorſe conſume his very vitals, make life a burden, and a deliverance from it earneſtly wiſhed and ſought for. He is conſcious of having deſerved ill from all rational and moral agents, and is in a continual dread of a recompence ſuitable to the demerit of his crimes. Now let any man judge whether ſuch a ſtate be eligible; rather, whether it be not the worſt that a rational creature is capable of in this world; whether, therefore, by the very

very frame of our nature it be not ill with the wicked, and conſequently well with the righteous. It is true in the preſent condition of being, both the joy of a ſelf-approving, and the torment of a ſelf-condemning conſcience, are in ſome degree abated by the cares, the buſineſs, and amuſements of life (when animal nature ſhall ceaſe, and the union of the mind with fleſh and blood ſhall be diſſolved, they will then be felt in a more intenſe degree than we can now comprehend) but experience doth convince ſome, and a careful attention will convince every man, that the one is the greateſt felicity, and the other the greateſt miſery of our nature. SERM. XI.

The truth of what has been aſſerted, is univerſally acknowledged in thoſe inſtances, which are the moſt perfect in their kind: A very eminently good man, is not only the object of the higheſt veneration and eſteem to others, but believed to be the happieſt in himſelf; and a complete immoral ſtate is own'd to be miſerable; but in lower degrees, which are the moſt common among mankind, the advantage or diſadvantage is not ſo ſenſibly felt, and the difference is ſlightly paſs'd over as of little conſideration.

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ſideration. If, however, the principle be true, that virtue is the good or happineſs, and vice the ill or miſery of every man, it muſt hold univerſally, and always in proportion. How unreaſonable were it to imagine that indeed the man who is perfect in righteouſneſs, is perfect in enjoyment, and the thoroughly wicked is the moſt unhappy, but that the intermediate characters between theſe two extremes are indifferent, with reſpect to enjoyment? That a ſound entire mind, as to its moral ſtate, is a great happineſs, a temper wholly deſolute and vicious is neceſſarily miſerable, and yet that happineſs doth not riſe and fall, according to the meaſure of our oppoſite moral qualities? Let us be aſſured, and always keep it in mind, that whenever in any inſtance we depart from our integrity, we are ſo far hurting ourſelves and acting againſt our own intereſt; and in the degree wherein we amend our temper and our ways, are ceaſing to do evil, and learning to do well, increaſing in virtue and abounding in the fruits of righteouſneſs, in the ſame degree we are promoting our own true happineſs, which doth not depend, even in this world, ſo much on the circumſtances

ſtances of our outward condition, as the diſ- SERM.
poſitions of our minds and our moral con- XI.
duct.

This argument has been largely inſiſted on, and the force of it clearly ſeen by wiſe and thoughtful men, without the advantage of a revelation, even when they were uncertain concerning a future ſtate, as ſome of them at all times, and probably all of them at ſometimes, were: It was the foundation on which they maintained the excellence and the eligibleneſs of virtue, as moſt becoming the dignity of a rational nature, and the chief good of man, abſtracting from any conſideration of God's interpoſing, to reward and puniſh men according to their works. But if we take in that conſideration, the ſtrength of the argument will become irreſiſtible, and the prophet's aſſertion in the text will reſt, not only on the conſtitution and ſtate of human nature, as we find it by obſervation and experience, but the evidence we have of the being, the perfections, and the moral government of God, from which it is a juſt conſequence. We are, then, to conſider righteouſneſs not merely as the glory of the human mind, and the naturally felicitating exerciſe and attainment

SERM. XI. attainment of its powers, but farther as it is approved, and recommended to mankind, by the Deity, their rightful and ſupreme ruler. That there is an intelligent and good author of nature, all his works proclaim; and that he has manifeſted his will and ſome of his deſigns in his works of creation and providence to his rational creatures, thereby to direct him in the courſe of their voluntary actions, is alſo very evident. For as we cannot but conclude in general what he intended by the relations, dependency, and order of things. For inſtance, to what end the ſun and the earth were placed in ſuch a ſituation, with reſpect to each other as they are; that the earth affording ſuch a variety of conveniencies for animals was deſign'd for their habitation; we know by conſidering the uſes of the ſeveral parts in our animal frame, what nature, that is, the author of nature form'd them for; that eyes were made for ſeeing, feet for walking, and hands to be inſtruments for action; ſo ſince, in particular, it appears that we are creatures capable of various pleaſure and pain, in conſequence of our own voluntary actions, and we can foreſee the conſequence, it is not with any pretence of reaſon to be doubted, but the wiſe and good author of nature deſign'd,

ſign'd hereby that the courſe of our actions ſhould be ſo directed, as we might promote our own happineſs and avoid miſery. Now this is as evidently true, with reſpect to moral actions, and the conſequences of them, as any other; we know their difference as clearly, and are as free in our choice, we are as certain, too, of the event of the connection between virtue and happineſs, between wickedneſs and miſery; from whence it plainly follows, that God deſign'd by this conſtitution and ſtate of things wherein we are placed, that we ſhould chooſe what is morally good, and refuſe the evil; in other words, that we are under a moral law, and God is our moral governor; or that he has declared his will concerning our conduct, and given us a rule of action, enforced by a ſanction, or by rewards and puniſhments, annexed to the obſervance of it, and our diſobedience to it, which ſhould determine our behaviour as rational creatures. SERM. XI.

Hence ariſes a conſideration of great weight; not only we find by experience, in the ordinary courſe of things, that it is well with the righteous, and ill with the wicked; or, that there is in fact a connection between

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virtue and happineſs, and between vice and miſery; but it is ſo eſtabliſhed by the ſovereign will of the great law-giver, whoſe power none can reſiſt. We have the cleareſt evidence that he approves the good actions of men, and diſapproves the bad; whence we infer that one part of his own character is moral rectitude, which is a perfection that neceſſarily appears to our minds amiable, and every way worthy of the moſt excellent nature; and ſince he is our natural governor, by whoſe will we exiſt, are preſerv'd, and all the circumſtances of our condition are determined, here is a ſufficient intimation of the rule, according to which he doth, and will always proceed, in his diſpenſations towards us, making us happy or unhappy. This being ſuppos'd as a certain principle, let us ſee how it is to be applied to the preſent ſtate of things, and what conſequences follow from it. The adminiſtration of providence in this world has a contrary appearance, for it ſeems to be promiſcuous: As *Solomon* ſpeaks, *all things come alike to all, none knows either love or hatred*; that is, the favour or diſpleaſure of God, *by all that is before him*, by the events which happen to

to men in the ordinary courſe of the world, which makes the point we are now conſidering appear doubtful; and great multitudes of mankind ſeem not to believe it; at leaſt, it has not that influence on their diſpoſitions and their lives, which a principle of ſuch importance ſeriouſly believed and attended to might be expected to have. The true anſwer to this difficulty, is, that though God be a ruler perfectly righteous, who moſt certainly will diſtribute rewards and puniſhments to his reaſonable creatures, according to their works, yet in this he acts freely and with perfect wiſdom; not neceſſarily at all times, and in every diſpenſation towards them, making the difference among them which is to be made finally and in the whole, but chooſing the manner and the time for his righteous diſtribution, which to his infinite underſtanding appears the moſt proper: And that we now appear plainly to be in a ſtate of diſcipline, wherein one part of our appointed trial ariſes from the imperfection of our knowledge, concerning the event of virtue and vice in our practice. It pleaſes God now to leave the obligations of virtue more imperfect, and the motives to it leſs over-

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bearing than they might be, or may be in another ſtate, but yet they are ſufficient, eſpecially ſince he has given us ſatisfying evidence of his own moral perfections and his moral government, though they do not ſhine out in their full ſplendor.

The true conſequence therefore from the promiſcuous adminiſtration in the preſent ſtate, ſo far as it is promiſcuous, is not that it ſhall be ſo throughout; but quite on the contrary, that the leſs manifeſtly it appears now to be well with the righteous, the more manifeſt it ſhall be hereafter: for, if the government of the rational creation be moral, and the ends of it muſt be obtained, it follows that they who ſincerely adhere to the cauſe of virtue, muſt in proportion be happy, not perfectly and apparently in every circumſtance and condition of their being, for that the divine wiſdom and rectitude do not require, but in the whole: When, and where, and in what manner, are points which our unfiniſhed reaſon doth not reach to. Here the ſcripture inſtructs us more particularly, aſſuring us that *the latter end of the perfect and upright man is peace; that the dead are bleſſed who die in the Lord; that God has appointed a day in which*

which he will judge the world in righteouſneſs by Jeſus Chriſt, who will be glorified in his ſaints, will give them crowns of life and glory, and ſhall take vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the goſpel. SERM. XI.

If we ſincerely believe the chriſtian religion, it is impoſſible to diſbelieve this article, which lies at the very foundation of it; indeed it may juſtly be called the foundation of all religion, which is nothing elſe but the practice of virtue out of reſpect to the Deity, or from a ſincere perſuaſion and acknowledgement of his Being, his moral perfections, and moral government, or his providence ruling the world in righteouſneſs; nay, virtue itſelf, in the moſt abſtract way of conſidering it, however amiable it may appear to the human mind, is left naked and deſtitute of its greateſt ſecurity, unleſs we be convinced of its connection with happineſs, and that it ſhall be well with the righteous. But ſtill this principle, as clear as it is and important, confirm'd by the concurring evidence of reaſon and revelation, and ſo nearly affecting the higheſt intereſt of every man in particular, has not that influence and effect on the minds and the practice of men which it ought to have. Whence

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doth this ariſe? Certainly from inattention, from the influence of particular affections, paſſions, and habits. There is nothing more unaccountable in the ſtate of human nature, and the conduct of its powers, than that men ſhould be determined to act againſt the conviction of their minds, and that the lower ſprings of action ſhould prevail againſt thoſe which are acknowledged to be ſuperior. This is our infirmity, but it is not remedileſs; and the remedy is in ourſelves: By a vigorous careful attention, and ſtrong reſolution, which our hearts will tell us are in our power, our contracted and even natural weakneſſes may be cured; but if we will not ſhew ourſelves men, we chooſe our own deſtruction, and periſh like fools. However, if *the filthy will be filthy* ſtill, let the *righteous* be *righteous* ſtill, aſſured that it ſhall be well with him.

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The Path of the Juſt, like the ſhining Light.

Proverbs iv. 18.

But the path of the juſt, is as the ſhining light, that ſhineth more and more, unto the perfect day.

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IN this book *Solomon* recommends religious virtue to our affectionate eſteem, to our choice and conſtant purſuit, by the character of wiſdom; a character which if it be juſtly applied, ſhould render it highly amiable to mankind; for what can be more agreeable to an intelligent nature, than the proper uſe, and the beſt improvement of underſtanding? Indeed if we fix our thoughts attentively in the contemplation of this excellent object, we cannot miſs of diſcerning its beauty; it ſhines by its own native ſplendor, and muſt ſtrike every rational being with a ſenſe of glory and dignity,

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which is no where elſe to be ſeen. Every thing under the ſun, when ſet againſt it, is but low in compariſon; the moſt finiſhed beauties of corporal nature are empty ſhadows; for it is in reality reaſon itſelf in its higheſt exaltation. But we muſt make a difference between the abſtracted idea of virtue or wiſdom, and the practice of it in human life. The one is truly a divine form; for moral rectitude and goodneſs is the glory of God himſelf, and in him it is a tranſcendent excellence, which is the object of our higheſt admiration and love, though we cannot form adequate conceptions of it. The other virtue, as exemplified in human characters, is a faint image, ſhaded not only with intellectual imperfections, as it is in all finite beings, whereby they come infinitely ſhort of abſolute wiſdom and original holineſs, but with moral defects in our preſent ſtate; for *there is not a juſt man that liveth upon the earth and ſinneth not*, who has not ſome remaining weakneſs, whereby he is in danger of being drawn away into evil and folly. And yet imperfect as it is, virtue makes an important difference among men, a difference between their characters, and a difference between their conditions.

The

The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour; he is wiſer, he is better, and he is happier, and in the end he ſhall appear much more diſtinguiſhed in all theſe reſpects. The text repreſents virtue in this imperfect view, as practiſed by weak and frail mortals, and therefore as far below that conſummate moral excellence, which ſhines in ſome finite beings, not to ſpeak of the ſupreme; nay, far below what our own nature is capable of, and what the ſpirits of juſt men made perfect have actually attained. Our goodneſs here, the goodneſs of the ſincere, is not like the *morning cloud that paſſeth away*, but it is like the morning dawn which is weak in its beginning, but gradually increaſes in brightneſs, till it ariſes to its meridian glory. The path of the juſt, even the imperfectly juſt, has a real, ſubſtantial excellence whereby it is eſſentially diſtinguiſhed from the path of the wicked; they differ as light and darkneſs, which are the moſt oppoſite to each other, and their difference is a common proverbial deſcription of things moſt directly contrary, which can never be reconciled or conſiſt together, and which in their kinds and qualities ſet againſt each other, are the beſt and the worſt, at leaſt, very SERM. XII.

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very good and extremely bad. Thus *Solomon* here ſpeaks concerning the path of the juſt and the wicked; the former, he ſays in the text, is as *the ſhining light*; and in the verſe immediately following, *the way of the wicked is as darkneſs.*

My intention in this diſcourſe is to conſider the beauty, dignity, and excellence of religious virtue in human characters and actions, not only in general, but in the differences of its ſtate, and the various ſteps of its progreſs, from its weak imperfect beginnings to its conſummation. It is *like the ſhining light that ſhineth more and more to the perfect day.* It is not neceſſary to *deſcribe* the path of the juſt; it is nothing elſe but the practice of virtue, of moral piety, of righteouſneſs, of temperance, and charity, which I ſuppoſe ſo far univerſally known, as to make the encomium *Solomon* gives it, that it is *as the ſhining light*, eaſily intelligible. Only let it be obſerved, that the whole of virtue is comprehended, and every eſſential branch of it muſt be reduced to practice in the path of the juſt. Philoſophy itſelf determines, and it is plain to every one who attentively conſiders it, that the virtues are inſeparable; at leaſt, that no character can be eminent

eminent for any one of them, which is de- SERM. ſtitute of the reſt. *Rigid juſtice* will dege- XII. nerate into cruelty, if it is not accompanied with *beneficence*; and to both theſe, that they may ſhine in any character conſtantly and uniformly, muſt neceſſarily be added *temperance*, or a ſteady ſelf-dominion, a due government over the appetites and paſſions: But in ſuch a ſtate as that of the world is, full of temptations, both blandiſhments and terrors, none of all the virtues which have been named, can ſubſiſt without *fortitude*, a firm inviolable reſolution of cleaving to what appears right and good, whatever difficulties and dangers may attend it: And, *laſtly*, as all theſe are the qualities, the works, or rational exerciſes of intelligent Beings, not the reſult of mere inſtinct, but of calm reflection; and, eſpecially, as great regard is to be had in them to a variety of external circumſtances, they muſt all of them be conducted with *prudence*. But to us chriſtians the caſe is exceeding plain by the rule of our religion, which is delivered in the form of a law, containing ſhort and plain precepts enforced by proper ſanctions, and other motives. Will you meet with one declaration in the bible which authoriſes you

to

SERM. XII. to detach a ſingle virtue, or a few, from the body, the ſyſtem of virtues, and to make it or thoſe few the whole of your religion, ſufficient to denominate you true chriſtians, to ſatisfy the demand of your profeſſion, and entitle you to the rewards of chriſtianity? No, the contrary is indeed exceedingly clear, not one good moral quality or good work is omitted or left out of the religious character, or *the path of the juſt*, as it is deſcribed in the word of God; but every branch of our duty to God, our fellow creatures and ourſelves, is frequently inculcated, and ſtrongly enforced. Sometimes we have the whole of our duty thrown together in ſhort and beautiful deſcriptions; the *high way of holineſs*, as the prophet * *Iſaiah* calls it, exactly delineated; and every road, that is, each particular virtue in the *path of the juſt* marked out to us. Thus we are told, that what God requires of us, is to *do juſtly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God* ||. And St. † *Paul* ſays, that *the grace which hath appeared bringing ſalvation, teaches us to live ſoberly, and righteouſly, and godly, in this preſent world.* Will

* Iſ. xxxv, || Mic. vi. 8. † Tit. ii. 12.

you

you then imagine, that to be juſt in your dealings with mankind, is ſufficient to make you the true diſciples of Jeſus Chriſt, and give you confidence towards him, when he ſhall come to judge the world, while you indulge yourſelves in ſome ſecret vices, contrary to ſobriety? Or that freedom from theſe, in conjunction with the other, will be ſufficient, while the neceſſary offices of moral piety are neglected? or will you on the other hand think that to be devout, to abound in the inſtituted ſervices of religion, is enough to the purpoſes of chriſtianity, while you are unrighteous and uncharitable? No; this is not to be chriſtians, this is not *the path of the juſt*, for it comprehends all the parts of our duty. See what the apoſtle St. *James* ſays expreſsly in the ſecond chapter of his epiſtle, and 10th verſe: *whoſoever ſhall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point* (habitually, or wilfully and deliberately) *he is guilty of all.* SERM. XII.

Having made this remark, which I thought neceſſary, to give us a true idea of the path of the juſt, that is, of religious virtue, as it is exemplified in human characters, or, as it is reduced to practice by men having infirmity, which, tho' it be imperfect,

SERM. XII. imperfect, yet muſt be ſincere; and in order to that univerſal, I ſhall now proceed to conſider the doctrine of the text, that this *path of the Juſt*, a life of holineſs, filled with the fruits of righteouſneſs, mercy, and godlineſs, ſo far as theſe virtues may be attained in this world, nay, ſo far as they are actually attained by every good man; that this, I ſay, *is a ſhining light, which ſhineth more and more unto the perfect day.* The expreſſion immediately raiſes in our minds the idea of excellent, regular, and lovely, for all theſe characters are obviouſly imported in ſhining light, ſet in oppoſition to darkneſs, which is naturally the image of confuſion and horror; but we muſt keep in our thoughts the nature of the ſubject to which the alluſion is applied, it is a rational, not a ſenſible light, a ſpiritual, not a corporeal ſplendor. The firſt thing therefore which occurs, as imported in the figure, is, that the way or the life of the juſt morally conſidered, comprehending his temper and his conduct, the whole tenor of his deliberate deſigns, and the courſe of his actions, is a regular ſcheme formed according to one model, and under one uniform direction: One principle animates the whole,

one

one rule guides all its movements, and one great end is conſtantly purſued in it. Light ſhows every thing truly as it is; a man walking in it, ſees his way and the end of it; he is enabled to purſue his aim ſteadily, keeping it always in view; he knows how to chooſe his ſteps without turning aſide, and to avoid dangers: Like this is the principle of virtue in the heart directing the converſation; it is always the ſame unvarying guide, admirable for its ſimplicity, without a mixture of interfering counſels, without a diverſity of inconſiſtent views; it leads us on to the one end of faith and of all religion, the ſalvation of the ſoul, which is nothing elſe but what my text calls the *perfect day*, or the perfection of virtue itſelf. Whatever diverſity there is in the way, that is, in the practice of religion, as it has been deſcribed, containing righteouſneſs, piety, temperance and charity, yet not only the end is the ſame, but the ſpring of action, the one principle of faith working by love, the love of God and of mankind. Under the influence of this great animating ſpring, the *good work* of God proceeds uniformerly to its perfection; the divine nature, as St. *Peter* calls it, holds on its regular courſe, SERM. XII.

SERM. XII. courſe, having all the active powers of the human nature in ſubjection to it, with the full conſent of approving reaſon, and applauding conſcience, the *candle of the Lord.* But how unlike this is the way of the wicked, which *Solomon* juſtly calls darkneſs; vain thoughts, fooliſh and hurtful luſts, blinding the underſtanding and corrupting the heart, produce nothing but wild diſorder. No one end is ſteadily purſued, no governing principle adhered to; but jarring paſſions are its unequal guide, by which the unhappy perſon under their power is furiouſly hurried not knowing whither, ſometimes to the purſuit of tumultuous brutal pleaſures, of periſhing earthly riches, which moth and ruſt corrupt, and thieves break through and ſteal; or of fading honours, according as the *luſt of the fleſh*, the *luſt of the eyes*, or *the pride of life*, happen to have the aſcendant; ſometimes into imaginary ſcenes of danger, and even into black deſpair, when diſtracting fear prevails, or *the ſorrow of the world, which worketh death*; ſometimes again into outragious madneſs, or meditated miſchief, when wrath and revenge are predominant; and all theſe blind guides in their turns rule the way of the wicked,

wicked, which therefore is, according to another elegant ſcripture compariſon, *like the troubled * ſea that cannot reſt, but is in perpetual confuſion, driven by the winds, and toſſed.* Our paſſions, eſpecially when ſtrengthened by indulgence, and confirmed by evil habits, bring the mind into an unhappy ſtate of ignorance, and leave the moral conduct under no proper direction; which our ſaviour, agreeably to the figure in my text, excellently repreſents by the alluſion of an evil eye, *Matthew* vi. 22, 23. *The light of the body is the eye, if therefore thine eye be ſingle, thy whole body ſhall be full of light: But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body ſhall be full of darkneſs; if therefore the light that is in thee be darkneſs, how great is that darkneſs!* As the vitated organ of ſight is dangerous to the body, leaving a man without any juſt direction how to walk ſafely, and to ſhun ſnares and precipices, ſo the judgment of the mind concerning moral differences, or whatever is neceſſary and of the utmoſt importance to human happineſs, being corrupted and miſled by luſt and paſſion, is in deplorable darkneſs, not knowing

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* Iſaiah lvii. 20.

SERM. XII. at all how to guide its way, or how to eſcape its ruin, as *Solomon* ſays in the place already referred to, verſe 19, of this chapter; *the way of the wicked is as darkneſs, they know not at what they ſtumble.* And elſewhere, *the* * *prudent man foreſeeth evil and hideth himſelf, but the ſimple paſs on and are puniſhed.* They precipitate themſelves into deſtruction, not diſcerning, or not determined by the moſt obvious truths concerning the neceſſary unalterable diſtinction of moral good and evil, and the moſt certain oppoſite conſequences of them, happineſs and miſery; ſo infatuated are they by their vices, and hardened thro' the deceitfulneſs of ſin.

Secondly, As the path of the juſt ſhines with intellectual light, illuminated with knowledge, and conducted with wiſdom, and therefore a conſiſtent regular ſcheme; ſo it is accompanied with inward ſerenity and ſatisfaction. *Solomon* obſerves, *Eccleſiaſtes* xi. 7. *That truly the light is ſweet, and a pleaſant thing it is for the eyes to behold the ſun.* It is not only itſelf a very agreeable object, but it ſhows us the beauties of the world about us, and human life depriv'd of

* Prov. xxii. 3.

that

that entertainment, is rendered very uncom- SERM.
fortable; ſo is the knowledge of religious XII.
wiſdom to the ſincerely virtuous mind, and
the righteous *goes on his way rejoicing, for*
* *great peace have they who love God's law,*
nothing ſhall offend them. The † ways of
wiſdom are found to be *ways of pleaſantneſs,*
and all her paths are peace. They are a
delightful object of the mind's contemplati-
on; but when they are reduced to practice,
and the life is regulated by them, it is ac-
companied with an uninterrupted ſeries of
flowing pleaſures, a pure, a rational, and
ſolid joy, which nothing elſe in the whole
compaſs of human life and affairs can yield.
Not only ſo, the principles of religion plant-
ed in the heart, and diffuſing their influence
thro' the whole ſcheme of life, ſet every
thing about us in a fair and amiable light.
To an uninlightened mind the world ap-
pears full of diſorder; puzling difficulties
ariſe upon every ſubject it can turn its thoughts
to, how to reconcile the appearances of na-
ture to ruling intelligence, and the events of
time, particularly in the condition of man-
kind, to a wiſe, a righteous, and good ad-
miniſtration: Theſe are points too high for

* Pſal. cxix. 165. † Prov. iii. 17.

SERM. XII. the natural man, as St. *Paul* calls him, that is, the carnal, the vicious man, to underſtand; and his ignorance renders the works of God joyleſs to him, nay, fills his mind with diſtracting perplexity. But *knowledge is eaſy to him that underſtandeth* as *Solomon* ſpeaks, *Proverbs* xiv. 6. pious ſentiments deeply impreſs'd on the ſoul, and virtue become its very temper, give ſuch a ſenſe of worth and of excellence and wiſdom, in the frame of nature ſtill conducting its adminiſtration, that all theſe doubts vaniſh; the world puts on a ſmiling countenance; every thing in it appears lovely as the creatures of God, every event as his wiſe appointment; afflictions are gentle and eaſy chaſtiſements intended for good, death itſelf is ſtripped of its terrors, and therefore amidſt all the mazes of life, and the intricacies of providence in the whole of its government, which is to us inexplicable, the mind conſcious of integrity, and ſatisfied from itſelf, enjoys its own exiſtence, nay, in ſome ſenſe, enjoys all things with comfort; is well pleas'd with the world, as under the œconomy of its heavenly father, who is in the wiſeſt manner carrying on his own good deſigns;

designs; and is easy in the situation he hath appointed for it. SERM. XII.

Thirdly, The path of the just does not only shine clearly inwards, not only is it a luminous path in itself, it also sends light abroad, that is, communicates profitable instruction to, and hath an useful influence on those who have the opportunity of observing it. Our Saviour recommends it to his apostles, the same in their measure and proportion, is also the duty of all his other followers, to let *their* * *light shine before men, that they may see their good works, and glorify their father who is in heaven.* That is, to make the sincerity and the power of virtuous principles, conspicuous in their exemplary conversations, that the attention of those who should see them, might be engaged to true religion, and they might by that means be induced to believe, to profess, and practise it, to the glory of God, in the advancement of his kingdom of righteousness, and peace over his intelligent creatures. Next to extraordinary divine interposition by messengers commission'd from heaven to teach it, perhaps there is not any thing which has contributed so much to the preserving and

* Matt. v. 16.

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propagating religion in the world, as the examples of good men; and indeed they have a plain natural tendency to this purpoſe, not only by giving a juſt notion of that excellent practical ſcience or diſcipline, which is better underſtood, and makes a ſtronger impreſſion when it is repreſented in life and action, than by any deſcription or abſtract reaſoning; but farther, they ſhew that religious virtue, as ſublime as it is, yet is not ſo far raiſed above the condition of frail humanity, as to be quite impracticable in our preſent ſtate. When we hear of hardy temperance, of humble and fervent devotion, of inflexible juſtice, and laborious charity, we are apt to think theſe are beautiful ideas indeed, but they go little farther than the imagination, they do not enter into the heart, nor animate our reſolutions; but when we ſee the ſame virtues actually practis'd by men of like paſſions with ourſelves, and who are liable to the ſame temptations, the light ſtrikes us with greater force, and inſpires with a deſire of imitation. Some rare inſtances there were of eminent virtue in the heathen world, who caſt a ſmall glimmering light into that region of darkneſs, at leaſt, if they made very few converts, they obtained

tained great reputation, and their names have been handed down with honour to ſucceeding generations: But the moſt fruitful ſeminary for propagating religious knowledge, has been the ſchool of Chriſt; it is according to his own compariſon, *Matt.* v. 14. *a city ſeated on a hill, conſpicuous from afar, and a candle not put under a buſhel, but in a candleſtick,* the moſt convenient ſituation for ſpreading its light abroad. It is certain, chriſtianity has produced the brighteſt patterns of extraordinary virtue, and the greateſt number of them. After our great maſter himſelf, the true light of the world, whoſe character is abſolutely without a parallel, and ever will be among mankind, many of his diſciples form'd upon his model, were very illuſtrious examples of all goodneſs, by the innocence of their lives, their inviolable integrity, the purity and ſimplicity of their manners, their heroic charity, and invincible patience under ſufferings, leaving ſtrong convictions of a reality and excellence in religion, upon the minds of very corrupt men, even of their perſecutors; becoming likewiſe the ſucceſsful inſtruments of converting multitudes from the errors of their way. Thus I have

SERM. XII. ſhown you that the path of the juſt, or religious virtue exemplified in human characters, or as practiſed by men having infirmity, is as a ſhining light; it is in itſelf excellent, beautiful and regular, uniformly conducted with wiſdom; and free from that obſcurity, ignorance and confuſion, which are inſeparable characters of a wicked and vicious courſe; it is accompanied with a conſtant inward ſerenity and ſelf-approving joy, and it conveys uſeful inſtructions to thoſe who behold it.

I ſhall, in the next place, conſider it as an increaſing light, and advancing to perfection, which the text plainly leads us to; for the path of the juſt is ſaid to be a ſhining light, that ſhineth more and more unto the perfect day. It is not like a fiery meteor which, having no abiding cauſe of light, only makes a blaze, and is extinguiſh'd, nor does it ſhine only by reflection with a borrow'd luſtre, but like the ſpring of day animated by an inward undecaying principle, it riſes in ſplendor from its low and more obſcure beginnings, going on gradually to perfection. Like the natural early dawn, in this reſpect, is the principle of virtue, or what the ſcripture calls the *ſeed*

of

of God, and the *new creature*; it is weak, but it is entire and permanent, naturally growing up to maturity. We ſhall be convinced it muſt be ſo if we attend to the conſtitution of our own minds; for the intellectual and moral, indeed all the active powers of the human nature, are weak and narrow at firſt; they enlarge by degrees, they acquire ſtrength by exerciſe, and are improv'd by habits; every ones experience will ſatisfy him in this, who reflects on his own progreſs in knowledge, and in all the qualities which render life either agreeable or uſeful. What a poor unfiniſhed, unadorn'd, and inſipid thing, is the life of man in infancy, though indued with all the capacities which belong to its kind, till obſervation and uſe have form'd it to the proſecution and attainment of its proper ends? Religion muſt in this reſpect be like all other improvements of nature, which depend on the exerciſe of our own powers; nay, it is ſo more peculiarly, becauſe it depends more upon ourſelves, and requires a more ſerious and attentive reflection and care, than many other improveable qualities or ſciences, which we can attain: It differs therefore ſo far from the viſible light, which neceſſarily

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SERM. XII. ceſſarily ſhines more and more to the perfect day. The path of the juſt, tho' naturally capable of growth, and made for it, does not actually grow without the voluntary and vigorous exertion of its inward active powers; every good man knows, for he is conſcious of it, the progreſs of virtue in himſelf, the dexterity, the eaſe and pleaſure, which attend the practice of it in proportion as he makes it his earneſt ſtudy, and the object of his conſtant and careful application; as on the contrary, by indolence and ſloth, darkneſs grows upon us, and indiſpoſition of mind; our inward ſatisfaction decays, and uſefulneſs in the world to the glory of our heavenly father, and the good of mankind, by promoting the cauſe of truth and virtue. 'Tis thus that the ſcripture repreſents the religious ſtate, as by the divine ordination concerning it, and the law of its nature, progreſſive. It is compared to the vegetable, and to the animal life, which from a very weak and low beginning, grows up to its appointed perfection, to its beauty and fruitfulneſs; and the ſenſitive kind to the full uſe of its powers and its enjoyment. The ſimilitude of a man, growing up from infancy to mature age, is a very familiar one, in deſcribing

deſcribing the progreſſive condition of chriſ- SERM. XII.
tians; and they are diſtinguiſhed according to the meaſure of their advancement into babes and perfect men, by the apoſtle *Paul*. And St. *John* makes three ſtages of the ſpiritual life, *little* * *children*, *young men*, and *fathers*. But ſtill, it is evident that this progreſs depends upon ourſelves: It is injoined as our duty; recommended by the beſt examples, and we are encouraged to it by the promiſe of an ample reward, in proportion to the meaſure of our zeal, diligence and proficiency during our being in a ſtate of diſcipline. We are exhorted *to* † *grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt*; to add ſtill to the meaſure of our virtue, and multiply our fruits of righteouſneſs more and more, which is ſhining more and more in the ſenſe of the text. St. *Paul* propoſes himſelf as a pattern for our imitation, when ſenſible of his not having attained, neither being already perfect, ‡ *leaving the things which were behind, and reaching forth to the things which were before, he preſs'd towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Chriſt Jeſus*, and we are taught that in exact proportion to

* 1 John ii. 12, 13 † 2 Pet. iii. 18. ‡ Phil. iii. 13.

the

SERM. XII. the meaſure of ſhining, not apparent, but real genuine virtue here, ſo ſhall the future felicity be; *he that ſoweth ſparingly ſhall reap alſo ſparingly, and he that ſoweth bountifully ſhall reap alſo bountifully* *.

But there is an appointed ſtandard of virtue, towards which we ſhould always aſpire, which is its moſt complete ſtate, repreſented here under the notion of the *perfect day*. I do not mean that there is a preciſe limit ſet to intellectual and moral attainments, and pleaſures, beyond which they cannot paſs, even in the future ſtate; the inequality of the heavenly glory, plainly declared in ſcripture, and compared to the unequal brightneſs of the firmament, and of particular ſparkling ſtars in it, or luminous ones, and to the difference between the ſtars themſelves; this, I ſay, leads us rather to ſuppoſe the contrary: And, indeed, our rational nature and powers, infinitely ſhort of abſolute perfection, ſeem by their conſtitution to be always capable of progreſs: But what I mean, is, that there is a perfect day to come, a ſtate ſo far of conſummate virtue and righteouſneſs, as to be free of all moral blemiſhes, and to exclude all ſinful

* 2 Cor. ix. 6.

failures,

failures, not fully underſtood by us *(for eye hath * not ſeen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him)* which at preſent terminates all our wiſhes and aims. We have but general and weak notions of what may be hop'd for beyond it; and every good man painfully reflecting on the infirmities which now cleave to him, reſts with contentment and joy in the happy proſpect of that exalted condition, in which he ſhall be wholly free from ſin, and from temptations to it; the devout and virtuous affections ſhall have their full ſcope, and no more be controuled or reſtrained in their exerciſe by inferior appetites and paſſions. This may well be called the *perfect day*, when ſet againſt the weakneſs, the obſcurity, and the diſcomfort of our ſtate in this world. To it we ſhould always aſpire with a noble ardor of mind, and to it our feeble virtue tends; every vigorous ſtep, however, we take, brings nearer to it, and alſo is accompanied with a preſent reward in the increaſe and confirmation of good habits themſelves, which really is a ſubſtantial happineſs, and with SERM. XII.

* 1 Cor. ii. 9.

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a growing ſatisfaction. The apoſtle teaches in 2 *Corinthians* iii. 18. that our progreſs in true religion, which he calls the image of God, is *from glory to glory*, every ſtep we advance in it tends to enoble and dignify our nature, and brings an addition of true enjoyment.

The concluſion, is, that we ſhould engage our hearts to the love, the ſtudy, and the practice of virtue. Her own native charms are ſufficient to allure every rational being. They muſt be the moſt deſpicable kind of living creatures, and have the leaſt reliſh of life, who ſhun the light of Day, and chooſe rather to dwell in darkneſs. How degenerate are thoſe minds? Are they worthy to be called intelligent, who do not diſcern the beauty of holineſs, and have no taſte for the pleaſure of religious wiſdom? Yet ſo corrupt, ſo infatuated are multitudes of mankind, ſo loſt to a juſt ſenſe of the true dignity and glory of their nature; even profeſs'd chriſtians, many of them, have contracted this inſenſibility, above all others unexcuſable, becauſe God has held out a clear light from heaven to guide them in the way of righteouſneſs; he has mark'd out the ſhining path of the juſt, diſplay'd the progreſs

progreſs of it in all its beauty, and ſhewed that it ends in a perfect day. But this is the condemnation of men, hardened thro' the deceitfulneſs of ſin into obſtinate unbelief, *that they loved darkneſs rather than light, becauſe their deeds were evil.* But let us remember, it is not enough once to have ſeen the excellence of religious wiſdom, to have profeſs'd ourſelves her votaries, and that we have an affection for her, (the ſincerity of which can no otherwiſe be prov'd than by perſeverance and growing in it, and we ſhall diſhonour her more by turning away from the holy commandment, than if we had never known the way of righteouſneſs) they only who endure to the end ſhall be ſaved; and it is *by a patient continuance in well doing, that we are to ſeek for glory, honour, and immortality, ſo as to obtain eternal life.* SERM. XII.

The End of the FIRST VOLUME.